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***From Lockout to Breakout:
Father care and the transition to a gender equal enterprise***

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This publication is a supplement to the main study report

It provides a detailed outline of the recommendations arising from the study.

A copy of the [full study full-report: Fathers', Work and Care-Care\(FWC\): Opt Out or Lock Out?](#) can be obtained by contacting the researcher.

[A summary of the main study findings are presented in Appendix 1.](#)

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Introduction

The **Fathers', Work and Care (FWC)** study examined fathers' use of Parental Leave, flexible work practices and their influence on the distribution of work and care amongst couples. The findings exposed a complex relationship between fathers' primary earner role in the family, its constraints on their caregiving contributions and maternal workforce participation over the preschool years. The results suggest men are often locked into expectations of work and earning as are mothers to the caregiving role. Both have direct and often mutually reinforcing consequences on their workforce participation and run counter to parents' intentions to share work and care responsibilities more equally. Importantly, through exploring the experiences of working fathers in the context of their employment and family arrangements, the study also suggests the workplace can have a significant influence on couple's decisions about who stays at home to care, who works, and for how long.

The suggestions and recommendations in this supplementary report arise directly from the **FWC study** findings. They are designed to support employers, HR practitioners and policy makers to extend their gender diversity strategies and work and family policy approaches beyond being an 'employer of choice' for women.

The **study** findings identified that policy change on Paid Parental Leave and the implementation of flexible work practices was a first and necessary step in supporting working parents to negotiate a more equal work and care distribution- particularly for fathers. However, there were also a number of additional areas of influence from within the workplace that impacted decision making on primary care arrangements and acted as deterrents ~~to fathers~~ to fathers altering their work intensity to provide care.

According to participants, organisations and policy makers all make similar oversights in their gender diversity and work and family strategies. They appear to provide interventions that embody out-dated expectations of working parenthood, ultimately premised on the assumption that men should work and women should care. ~~In a broad sense, respondents described caregiving as tolerated and far embraced when undertaken by fathers. These assumptions appear to be challenged both implicitly and explicitly if attempts are made to provide care beyond flexibility around start and finish times and the use of carers leave for fathers.~~ Even those workplaces with strong egalitarian values and gold standard leave policies ~~for fathers and caregiving~~ showed signs of resistance to changes ~~from the that embody the~~ ideal worker norm as working full time, always available and unencumbered by care. As one participant noted-

There's just far too many white males, 40 to 55 years of age, who are set in their ways. And have very ... Well, they haven't had experience. But they're just very set. The blinkers are on. They see it one way. If you don't have this, then you're not in. If you don't have that, then you're not in. It's just black and white for them ... It's just Monday to Friday, these are your hours. Nothing changes. But nowadays, there's so much more variety in people's work arrangements and what they're looking for. It's almost like it's too much to compute for some people.

A key message arising from the study is that gender equality is simply not achievable without addressing the unequal distribution of work and caregiving amongst couples. As the findings from the study alluded to ~~the, the~~ gaps in expectations, need and experiences for earner / carer fathers as well as their partners all lead back to the impost of -ideal worker / ideal carer norms.

Nowhere is the prized position of the unbroken, full-time, and always available work pattern more obvious than the undertaking of several premier employers who have added the re-imburement of costs for delaying reproduction to their employee benefits schemes. This strategy announced in late 2014 by Google and Facebook for example, is evidence that to be *valued* in the workplace, women ~~they~~ must shape their careers and their work patterns more similarly to men. This involves delaying reproduction.

After 25 years of law, policy and social movements, career success and family are still considered so completely incompatible to the practices of the workplace we might willingly resort to such a drastic measure so women can achieve the same level of success as their male cohorts. A critical appraisal of the strategy reveals it is not in essence ~~a gender~~ gender diversity or women's empowerment strategy but is more akin to a gender replication one. It is ironic that the world's most innovative companies find it fit (and perhaps preferred) to use the most sophisticated and expensive science available today to delay reproduction in lieu of re- configuring their employment patterns and norms to accommodate birth and later caregiving. A strategy that delays reproduction for the sake of production is a stark reminder of the currency still used in the workplace. The fact that no reproductive delay strategy for men has been forwarded further reveals the gendered nature of work and care assumptions, their unconscious and often uncritical embodiment in policy frameworks and as a result, their reinforcing rather than transformative effects.

Whilst such questionable employee engagement incentives were not revealed in the FWC study sample, the findings do highlight that the premise of these policies is not new. Fathers are no doubt watching these 'innovations' and perhaps rethinking their caregiving aspirations and their consequences.

The opportunities for change presented in this report are designed to transform and evolve the gender diversity remit currently operating in most contemporary workplaces. Transitioning from a gender sensitive enterprise to a gender equal one relies on ~~A gender equal enterprise is only achievable when~~ equality being is pursued as an outcome of every transaction and endeavour, internally as well as commercially, and with the same vigour and belief as profit and efficiency.

The 'business case' for gender diversity has been well documented, yet gender equality remains peripheral rather than integral to people practices and productivity outcomes in the workplace. The ideas noted below are designed to disrupt the current cycle of women centred approaches that assist women to work and care. These have no doubt been helpful to ~~women,~~ women; however, the data from the FWC study highlights their limited success in addressing a central source of women's social and financial disadvantage – their exclusive and largely default responsibility for primary care

of children. It is here that the efforts on gender equality need to be directed and particularly at the enterprise level. ~~An overview of the FWC study including a summary of findings is presented in Appendix 1.~~

~~as it relates to work.~~

~~An overview of the FWC study including a summary of findings is presented in Appendix 1.~~

Ideas for Transformation - Employers

For employers that already have parental leave for fathers

Paid Parental Leave

a. Review approvals and anomalies

This might include re-examining performance management systems, talent, and succession planning to ensure that fathers who take this leave are not unduly penalised based on the timing of their leave. This should also consider implications of PPL on for-remuneration and benefits including bonus payments and share plans to ensure equity.

b. Review duration and coverage of PPL

Current PPL provisions should be regularly reviewed to ensure they keep pace with social expectations and need. Importantly, they must be equally accessible to mothers and fathers in the workplace. Offering a gender specific but equivalent primary care policy is essential. Anything less than specific and designated leave/leaves for fathers implicitly affirms mothers as the rightful primary carer and fathers as primary earner / secondary carer.

c. Extend access provisions

One of the gendered outcomes identified by the data relates to access rules for fathers and in particular having to take their PPL in the first 12 months. The strong association between fathers' leave taking and mothers' return to work means access rules for fathers may drive an earlier than desired return to work for mothers. If to qualify for PPL the father must take the leave within a 12 month time frame, the mother must return to work within 8–9 months (depending on the father's leave entitlement duration). This means the full term of her Maternity Leave entitlement is arbitrarily cut short. A review of the real business impacts on access time frames might be fruitful to explore – determining why this rule determine why this rule is in place in the first place and substantiating the e-the realistic impact on timing of the leave.

For those organisations that do not have this leave clause already, exploring the need for taking the leave part-time might also be fruitful. This latter addition would almost certainly drive a shared care arrangement between working couples and may actually increase maternal workforce participation through reducing reliance on non-parental care. Importantly, it would also make part-time work

less gendered and more visible for fathers. ~~This would be~~ particularly powerful if coupled with the strategy below.

d. Backfill fathers' PPL positions using female talent

One of the common barriers for women in taking up clout positions in the organisational hierarchy is their concentration in functional management roles and a lack of profit and loss (P&L) portfolio experience.¹ Since these roles are traditionally more saturated with men, the above strategy offers the opportunity for stretch assignments for women to gain experience in P&L functions when the fathers go on leave. It also potentially develops a mentor relationship between the original role incumbent and the secondee for future development.

It is possible that this strategy will also extend the primary leave duration of fathers. As the survey data ~~had suggested~~ shows fathers' **ideal leaves** are in line with mothers' current basic entitlements when paid at replacement rates however, fathers that **actually take** leave as the primary caregiver do so for shorter periods compared to women. Part of this is the paid entitlements aspect and the other is still trying to maintain position rank and oversight of work when on leave. Several fathers in the interview sample that took Parental Leave ~~for example~~ reported feeling pressure to return to work or difficulty fully 'stepping away', based on the gap left by their leave taking (when the position is not back filled). Most fathers that took PPL kept in weekly contact with their 'teams' and three of the five fathers in the interview sample commented that taking such leave the leave over the Christmas break ~~would be ideal as ideal~~ because it meant there was less impact to their productivity and their visibility at work.

This has been supported in research elsewhere² ~~found in other research in Australia in the tertiary education sector in particular~~ and together suggests ~~r, suggesting~~ that lack of replacement personnel can be a deterrent to taking more substantial levels of leave. This replacement strategy might also be effective in very senior positions where leave taking may be more problematic – even for short periods of time.

For employers that do not have Paid Parental Leave for Fathers

e. Introduce PPL for fathers over time

In line with the findings on ideal provisions from both the survey and the interviews, providing a primary care leave provision for fathers may improve the attraction, retention and engagement of working fathers with young children and fulfil an existing need from fathers to have more opportunities for care. Policy architecture would ideally follow the outline above (i.e. a leave allocation of their own paid at replacement rates, available later than 12 months after birth and / or on a part-time basis).

f. Encourage use of existing leave for primary care

Whilst cost is likely to be the biggest obstacle for many organisations in offering an exclusive and separate primary care leave policy for fathers, it may be possible to initially encourage fathers to use a portion of existing leave entitlement arrangements to be used for primary care. The

organisation could communicate options such using existing Paternity Leave for primary care and or / combining with through communication, education and exploration of subsidies through the Government Dad and Partner Pay (DaPP) provisions. The evidence consistently shows that primary care leave where the father takes on care in the absence of the ~~mother, mother~~ has different effects to Paternity Leave that is taken with the mother to assist in bonding and recovery post-birth. It is the primary care element and duration of leave that brings the equality benefits of the policy into the couples work and care distributions. It also positions fathers as a bona fide source of alternate care and as an equal parent to the mother. Both were reported in the FWC study as important to fathers.

In addition, the mothers in the interview sample who had with a partner that partners that took on a primary caregiver role when they returned to work said it provided a great level of comfort, made reintegration to work less stressful and improved the relationship between father and child. This would be particularly positive for those couples where the mother returns to work in the infant stages of development. ~~As the~~ As the data from the study alluded to, form the FWC has shown, parental care is not considered the ideal for children underless than 12 months of age. Formal care for these young children is not held in high regard by either fathers or mothers.

Finally, the primary caring fathers in the interviews and many from the survey expressed positive views if not delight when reflecting on their time with children as a primary caregiver.

“I was forced to stay at home as primary carer for several months due to circumstances. ~~~~ I resented it at the time, but it has helped me bond with my children immensely, and it was a valuable experience. Looking after my children is much harder than working in an office.”*

(Survey Participant)

“There’s no doubt that it made that challenge of leaving my child for the first time easier and it’s already hard enough to go back to work when you’ve been off for 12 months, but to have that stress taken out of it, was brilliant. I would recommend it to anyone.”

(Mandy ~~/Primary/~~ Primary Caregiver- Couples Interview)

These are positive outcomes that are worthy of consideration in their own right. On this basis, organisations currently without Paternal Leave provisions for primary care specifically for fathers would do well to consider this as a policy inclusion – particularly since the target cohort represents around 60% of the Australian labour force.³ Scope for use on part time basis will also have strong merit~~may also be good.~~

Transition to Parenthood Programs

Pre-birth Mentoring and Return to Work

a. Develop a father specific 'Transition to Parenthood' program

One of the major differences examined in the interview data was the differential experiences of mothers and fathers in terms of support for transition to parenthood in the workplace.

Fathers did not routinely report being provided with any specific program or support either before or after return from Paternity Leave. This represents another gendered experience that may be based on an erroneous assumption that the transition to working parenthood is only felt by mothers. Fathers said that return to work programs in organisational settings were not considered necessary by their employers because they traditionally only take a few weeks leave at or around birth. As one interviewee's stated, coming back from Paternity Leave in his employment context was akin to taking Annual Leave ... 'it was as if I had just gone on holidays'. The need for return to work support has been predicated on the *duration of the leave* rather than the material and psychosocial implications of transitioning to life as a parent worker. Both mothers and fathers need transition support regardless of their leave duration.

It is clear from much of the data provided in the ~~FWC study~~FWC study that fathers do experience profound change when transitioning to working parenthood and they have to manage a new set of responsibilities at home whilst maintaining an unaltered expectation of production and performance at work. Gender neutral provisions of return to work programs are not adequate given the gender specific experiences of working parenthood noted in the study and the unique pressures of the the primary breadwinning role. It is likely that fathers would benefit from both pre and post-birth guidance and support that move beyond handing over a brochure of entitlements. The intent should be to prepare ~~the~~ fathers for the changes inherent in the transition to working parenthood. It is further imperative that all discussions and materials encourage exploration and dialogue with their partner regarding options for participation in primary caregiving through available policy (flexible work practices and parental leaves as applicable).

A corresponding inclusion of the above strategies into existing programs for women would further the de-gendering of care. As noted in the interview data and research elsewhere, it is not just fathers that do not readily consider alternate models of caretaking such as shared parental care for example. 'Maternal gate keeping'⁴ has been a phrase often coined in terms of mothers' reluctance to share the care burden and ~~in the~~FWC study showed shared care options were largely unexplored beyond the assumption of mother care. Thus opening both men and women up to the notion of paternal care and early on in the care planning process, is a positive and necessary option for engineering a more gender equal care regime at the couple level, and will produce more equal results in terms of perceived support at the enterprise level. ~~enterprise.~~

Finally, the vast influence of line managers on the experience of work and care in the employment context makes managers the ideal conduit to deliver these supports as standard practice rather

than adopting a group program approach for men. Managing work and care from the outset becomes a shared goal between the working parent and the manager, reinforcing its value and recognition in the organisation.

Structural and Process Changes

b. Review the place of the 'Gender' portfolio in the structure of the organisation

Gender equality is inextricably linked to work and family outcomes because a great deal of gender inequality is related to the unequal distribution of work and care amongst parents. The FWC study highlights the critical need for gender diversity to be reconfigured and reconsidered in the structure of the organisation particularly around care and the barriers it entails because such care remains highly gendered.

Historically, Diversity and Inclusion portfolios arose in corporate enterprise as a result of affirmative action legislation relating to discrimination based on sex and race. These soon grew to include other minority groups in employment settings. The contemporary Diversity portfolio now holds a vast range of concerns and minority cohorts. For example, the Department of Social Services Diversity Strategy implies 17 different areas of potential diversity and focus in their Diversity and Inclusion portfolio.

'Workplace Diversity and Inclusion encompasses many positive aspects of life. It is about acknowledging the diverse skills and perspectives that people may bring to the workplace because of their gender, age, language, ethnicity, cultural background, disability, religious belief, sexual orientation, working style, educational level, professional skills, work and life experiences, socioeconomic background, job function, geographical location, marital status and family responsibilities'.⁵

With the amount of groups and conceptual characteristics included in contemporary Diversity portfolios, it is likely ~~Gender-gender Diversity-diversity~~ as a strategic business imperative can get lost in what is a well-intentioned but rather generic quest for broader social justice and equity in organisations. Gender as a psychosocial construct is somewhat different to other diversity concerns because it intersects into all aspects of working life and is a key determinant of one's life experience from birth.

The position of ~~gender equality efforts Gender-Diversity~~ within the organisational structure calibrates its importance within the enterprise. It is a taken for granted assumption that ~~gender equality is best served as function that Gender-~~belongs in the Diversity and Inclusion/ HR discipline. There is no empirical evidence that suggests this position is the most effective and it may potentially be self-limiting.

Firstly, gender as an employment concern is perhaps best viewed as a stand-alone specialist function. Lasting change to the gender contract in the workplace is less amenable to a project or program based approach. It requires the ~~embedding of~~ embedding of the gender equality ethos within the DNA of the enterprise. It is the reason we have specialist agencies such as the Sex Discrimination portfolio within the Human Rights domain and the Workplace Gender Equality Agency etc. rather than broader diversity and equality bodies. This is not just because it is a unique and specialist need but because it rests within a unique and specialist knowledge. To create a ~~truly~~ gender equal enterprise requires an understanding of the implicit and explicit ways gender disadvantage (inclusive of men and women) unfolds and its potential impact on the human capital and economic sustainability of the organisation.

Secondly, the way in which Gender Diversity is situated in the structure of the organisation can also impact its level of penetration and reach.

If the goal is to transform the organisation into a gender equal enterprise, then gender must sit higher and earlier in the organisational planning processes. It is difficult to be strategic in a functional or responsive portfolio of the business. When gender is situated more strategically (in Corporate Strategy, Corporate Sustainability or Executive Governance functions for example), gender justice can be imbued into the organisation and, in particular, the corporate strategy from the outset. An improved position in the corporate structure, and its repositioning as a standalone specialist function, will support a whole of enterprise approach to gender equality and raise the status of the remit. It will also take a much broader view of gender to incorporate the unique and specific (though often interdependent) experiences of men and women, mothers and fathers across a much wider range of systems and processes including commercial outcomes. At the present time gender equality is largely focussed inward and considered as a dimension of employment experience – yet gender disparity exists in all systems and processes including delivery of services, commercial undertaking and innovations.

Re-positioning the Gender portfolio will further provide a point of review. This function can ~~also act as a strategic review point and also act as the compliance – compliance~~ gateway to fulfil current reporting requirements for Workplace Equality Agency (WGEA) for example and assess all new policies and procedures, strategies and innovations (including mergers and acquisitions, product development and service delivery) for gendered inconsistencies and anomalies. This type of review mechanism has been used with some success in parliamentary policy procedures in regards to ~~for the elevation of~~ Human Rights. This entails that ~~Here new and~~ proposed legislation for example must now be accompanied by a Human Rights impact or compatibility statement. This type of process and strategic agenda setting would improve the success of any gender endeavour.

Finally, there has been much made of the importance of the CEO or other figurehead driving change and leading the gender equality agenda. Whilst this argument has enormous merit it also holds a level of risk that must be acknowledged.

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Effectively addressing issues relating to gender certainly requires leadership but it also needs time. Gender issues are not amenable to quick fixes partly because the underlying mechanisms of gender inequality are not always immediately visible and often involve unconscious bias⁶. Therefore, remedy would ideally cultivate personal insight and changing hearts and minds. Although the CEO is able to bring a sense of importance to the gender transformation agenda, they cannot necessarily drive the change at the practical level - especially in the case of in-large organisations. If change is to unfold and gain momentum, the research suggests it must become important and valued to *everyone*, be integrated into the machinery of the organisation and their key outputs, and will have more success if lead by a coalition of leaders rather than just one person⁷. The CEO is an excellent sponsor and figure head but reliance on their assent or energy alone can lead to atrophy. This latter issue is most relevant for the Australian context because our CEO's have one of the lowest average tenures worldwide. In ASX200 companies in Australia for example, average tenure has been reported as low as 4.2 years⁸. This is not enough time to embed the systemic changes -necessary changes-into the organisation.

~~d.c. Improve initiate more standardised practices for the application /-and approval of flexible work practices and caregiving leave.~~

As the survey and the interview data of the FWC study ~~noted -noted~~, flexible work practices and leave are an important part of the way that mothers and fathers balance work and care. This however appears to be a highly individualised experience where the direct manager has the most influence on approvals and actions. This is problematic in large organisations in particular because accountability and visibility is reduced the more authority is divested. This combined with the discretionary nature of flexibility in particular and the approvals and broader lack of some lack of clarity from men on their entitlements for care around entitlements, means there is more scope for bias to emerge. The experienced⁴ of respondents in the study suggested that decisions and approvals of flexibility and some leave types can be based on a range of considerations that may move beyond the scope set out in the policy guidelines and become both arbitrary and subjective.

As approval is in essence discretionary and in most organisations unchecked these decisions may benefit from a more formal or structured process that includes the manager, a diversity practitioner and perhaps a rotating staff member serving as a 'consumer' voice.

A more standardised, formal system such as this will help to ameliorate the highly variable experiences of employees regarding the organisation's commitment to work and life balance, family and gender. If an organisation chooses to include 'Family Friendly' as part of their Employer Value Proposition (EVP) for example, then it requires an independent and standardised practice for the application and approval of these assets so that the reality lives up to the promise. It is the consistency of experience that ~~drive~~drives the success of EVP's and employee engagement, experience And inconsistency that undermines both. This is the principle upon which most successful franchises rest so that no matter where you go you have your expectations of the brand and product met (McDonalds is an obvious example).

As simple as it sounds, line managers are essentially franchisees representing the brand and ultimately driving business success. Thus, on issues of culture and reputation, standardisation is essential for organisation serious about their employment brand and engagement.

In addition, a panel of independent arbiters can importantly preserve and protect the manager from any suggestion of poor judgement or unequal treatment, and further elevates the organisation's commitment to ensuring employees have equal access and assessment of applications for flexibility. In the absence of a positive right to flexible work practices, more standardised procedures such as those suggested here are all but necessary. Most large organisations already have some form of Diversity Council and a subcommittee from this group might also be worth exploring as an option.

Tactical Changes

a. Review and adjust language around employment and gender~~patterns of hours, work and gender.~~

Language can be a powerful blueprint for the way forward and a poignant reflection of the cultural reality in organisations. Review of the terminology used in an organisation could be an important part of a wider 'gender equality' audit. For example the term part-time work instantly connotes *less than* – reinforcing that part-time workers and part-time work is 'less than' the **full time** norm. Full-time work is presented and expressed as the norm simply by using its converse as a ~~alternative as a~~ derivative.

Changing the terminology from 'Full-time' or 'Part-time' to say either a 'Fixed or Flexible' roles immediately evokes a different energy and ideal. It communicates how the work in that role unfolds but without the value judgement inherent in being '~~P~~part-time' for example. This breaks down an assumption of a standard work pattern.

A more conscious reflection on the language of the organisation can have a powerful influence on culture and practice. The language used in organisations particularly on diversity issues can remove or reinforce stigma but also mask inequalities. Meaning is always contextual rather than literal. At the present time part-time work is virtually synonymous with working mothers for example.

A language audit would also assist in disengaging the gendered assumptions attached to these terms so as not to act as disincentives for their utilisation or take up by either sex or by those who may want to work differently for reasons other than caring responsibility.

b. Use of narratives to breakdown ideal worker norms

Stories are important in changing organisational practices and norms and can make it less 'unusual' for fathers to take Parental Leave or work flexibly to incorporate care. As the interviews in particular expressed the impact of stories and experiences from others can have a profound change behaviour influence on behaviour and open up possibilities people had not previously considered and the fulfilment of possibility. Several fathers in the sample said they never considered taking Parental Leave as a primary carer until they talked to or heard someone else doing it. For example, Rick actually took PPL applied and took the PPL as the primary carer for a few months when his wife Mary returned to work. He did this in response to hearing that another worker in the firm had done this. He in turn inspired others with the idea to follow suit.

'I didn't know you could do that and it became, after this one guy did it, it became quite culturally acceptable in the business for guys to do that'.

(Rick – Joint Caregiver)

Increasing the visibility of alternative narratives and paradigms that oppose or offer an alternative to ideal worker norms and caregiving as mothering will be important to the success of gender based change strategy. change strategies. Ideally stories of alternative models of work and care should have a gender element as well as a position element to incorporate norming care in senior positions (vertical range) and across different job types (horizontal range). Over time a CEO Job share role should become a feasible ambition and not a pipedream!

Ideas for Transformation: Government

Policy and Services

a. Review Paid Parental Leave

The data arising from the FWC study suggests that the architecture of the current statutory Paid Parental Leave scheme is unlikely to reach its third policy aim: to support a more equal sharing of care amongst parents.⁹ ~~It is not an equality enabling policy.~~

The Abbott Coalition Government had previously proposed changes to the existing ~~statutory PPL~~ scheme that included provision of a longer duration of leave (from 18 to 26 weeks), superannuation attachment and replacement pay scale for women. These had addressed several of the ~~deficiencies of the its-the~~ initial policy. However, plans for extension of the policy have ~~now~~ been withdrawn and replaced by a Productivity Inquiry into Childcare.

It is important to note ~~in the context of the FWC study outcomes that for the purpose of this publication that~~ neither the existing PPL scheme nor the Abbott Coalition Government proposals address the unique ~~barriers for issues for~~ men in taking up a greater level of primary care of preschool children. ~~within the policy.~~ Having the leave continue to default ~~to~~ the mother without a 'ring fenced' component for fathers as a primary caregiver and failing to give fathers replacement rates of pay reinforces the notion it is mothers ~~and not fathers~~ who should, would and will leave work to care for the children¹⁰.

In this context the Dad and Partner Pay (Dapp) provisions appear even more problematic. ~~Providing no —No provision~~ provision for primary care but a positive and heavily promoted provision for concurrent leave, reinforces the notion of fathers as a secondary carer only. Under the present scheme's arrangements and omissions, there is no sense of value placed on a primary care contribution from fathers but a positive reinforcement of fathers as a secondary carer, prescribed under the policy as a short presence to bond with the baby and support the primary carer. Both primary and secondary care provisions need to be considered and supported at the policy level. To do so for one at the exclusion of the other however ~~is undermining~~ ~~undermines any claims to equality of the equality agenda.~~ It fails to legitimize the role of the father as ~~viable alternative~~ caregiver and assumes his position as the primary bread winner.

Paid Parental Leave for fathers must also be viewed in light of current reforms proposed by the ~~Abbott~~ Coalition Government as part of the 2015 budget.

Whilst the motive of changes in the new 'families package' is to encourage women back to work by opening up an alternative source of care (e.g. Nanny care or formal child care for example), the data from the FWC study supports findings elsewhere, in that formal childcare is not the ideal scenario for couples when children are ~~very~~ young (and most particularly less than 12 months of age). When formal care is the only option available, the sample reported the lower earning partner (almost

always the mother) is *more likely* to stay home and withdraw from the workforce to care. In addition, once a care plan has been in place it is less likely to change over the preschool years even if circumstances change such as access to leave. As one respondent put it – the first 6 months of care are ‘habit forming’.

Providing PPL for fathers may be an important first step in altering the gendered pipeline of care in Australia. Mothers may be more likely to return to work if young children are being cared for by their partner when they initially return to work. In other words transitioning from mother care, to father care, to formal care may be a more appealing ~~if not enticing proposition compared to leaving the child in formal care settings as the mothers re- settles back into work. It may also have some positive to parents and also positive from a~~ productivity ~~outcomes perspective~~ because it may encourage the mother to return to work quicker than she may have otherwise done in the absence of care from the father.

b. Promote paternal caregiving as a norm

Government and their associated service providers can also assist in breaking down the gendered paradigms of work and care by re-examining supports that sit behind ‘family’ social and welfare services. This requires a repositioning of birth and care as more than a maternal ~~event experience~~ and doing so at the very earliest points of transitions to parenthood. Given that early primary care arrangements show a tendency to stay the same once established, timing and planning is crucial. Supporting ~~shared care from the parents from the~~ very beginning of their pregnancies will help a more proactive plan for care to be established and provide opportunities to include and prepare for father care.

Opportunities

i. Review antenatal classes and other relevant services

Antenatal classes provide a sound opportunity to explore shared care and the promotion of fathers’ more central involvement with caregiving. This could involve introducing parents to existing industrial entitlements (such as ~~to~~ Parental Leave and flexibility provisions under the New Employment Standards (ES)), arranging guest speakers who have adopted shared or primary care or made work adjustments to provide such care. Services could also tap into awareness raising resources such as the Equilibrium Man Challenge documentaries from the WGEA.

Commented [C2]: Expand this

There has already been some positive results from pilot programs that include father centred education and supports. The ~~positive outcomes of these results of these~~ evaluations have further exposed the gendered nature of existing services and a growing appetite for direct involvement of fathers in care.¹¹

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ii. *Review name and branding of Maternal and Child Health*

Although Maternal and Child Health –centres are mandated to provide assistance to ‘families’ the reality is fathers are not routinely included in the processes or screening procedures, and there is strong strong gender bias’ is an indicative gender bias-inherent in the name and branding of the service. With the rise of post natal depression in fathers and increasing evidence of its negative effects on children, improving father specific education, screening and inclusion practices would be beneficial in these settings and begin to break down the notion of being the ‘second parent’ ¹².

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iii. *Review collateral relating to families*

Many Government programs and services relating to parenting might benefit from a gender review. Focus should encourage the exploration of sharing primary care and incorporate care planning and functional arrangement of help and support beyond the immediate post-birth period. ~~At present, for example, antenatal classes do little to breakdown the gendered experiences of birth and care. The focus is almost exclusively on women, birth and breastfeeding with little or no attention to the transitional aspects of parenthood such as distribution of work and care, agreeing on roles and responsibilities, finances and importantly the redistribution of power that occurs following birth.~~ Imagery and narrative is also important to at least seed the possibility of shared care arrangements.

Future Research and Metrics

Future Research and Metrics~~The Road Ahead~~

Future Research and Metrics

The Fathers, Work and Care study provides insight into the work and care decisions of primary earner fathers. It views these decisions in the context of the workplace and also the preferences and constraints on their partner. It is however only the start point in building a complete understanding of the many issues raised by the study. In addition to the suggestions for change outlined above, further research should be pursued and extended beyond the limits of the exploratory analysis of the study. Importantly, this need not be undertaken by academics and researchers alone. Organisations would greatly benefit from pursuing research and evaluation as part of their transformation agenda.

a. Replicate study in other samples

Replication of the main areas of analysis from this study is recommended. Results cannot be generalised to samples in populations that diverge from the educated, white-collar sample of the study. It would be interesting and informative to contrast and compare aspirations, leave and care arrangements in contrasting or occupational or industrial settings.

b. ~~Gather a wider range of~~ Implement a standardised process to gather a wider range of data on caregiving

Do organisations really know how much time their employees spend on caregiving? What is the real 'need' contribution fathers are making to their families in terms of care? Ensuring the Human Resources Information Systems (HRIS) or equivalents effectively ~~capture~~captures all care based leave and flexible work arrangements will assist in understanding on this issue. this aim. The impression that fathers do not routinely provide care for children is somewhat unfounded – but it cannot be ~~can be~~ scrutinised unless metrics are in place to measure this and any trends and contingencies. through better metrics to capture levels of need and trends. A great deal of caregiving goes under organisational radars because it is done informally and is perhaps especially the case with fathers because there is still stigma attached to fathers making care a priority. One participant for example was reluctant to say he had to pick up his child and used a Dr's appointment excuse instead for his early departure.

One particular area of note in the FWC data worthy of mention on this point is the ~~showed~~ ex extensive use of carers leave by fathers and also personal leave entitlements for the care of sick children for example. Understanding trends in use of these leaves for example can help to generate more effective policy. It may be necessary to extend carers leave entitlements for example when children transition to formal care and are usually sick, or in the case of multiple births or when their partner first transitions back to work? Understanding these contexts and trends provides

opportunities to recognise the realities of care responsibility for working fathers and will likely expose 'hidden' care giving needs that can inform current offerings as potential attraction and retention strategies.

c. Implement lead and lag indicators on work and family policy issues

Work and family policy success might be best measured by lead indicators such as number of applications for leave specifically for care and flexible work practices not just the rates of approval and take up. The findings from the FWC study suggest that an enabling work climate would likely increase both applications and approvals of moderated work patterns for care for example. The interviews were replete with expressions of the manager and the immediate work environment as either 'family friendly' or otherwise - enhancing or inhibiting requests for changes and discussing work and family needs with their manager. Much of this came from informal observations of the manager's behaviour in the work environment. This suggests that lead indicators such as number of applications could be a sensible measure of just how 'safe' and confident employees feel as an earner and carer. It would also measure delivery on the promises in organisation's Employer Value Proposition in terms of work life balance. Rates of approval will only provide part this picture. Both measures would be easy to put in place with the more standardised practices on applications for flexibility in the process noted in 6.2 above.

d. Gender aggregate data ~~and that actively includes fathers in family measures~~ work and family by gender

Attending to women alone is no longer appropriate gender equality practice. This especially applies at the intersections of gender, work and care. If the gendered pipeline of care is considered a central driver of gender inequality in organisations and beyond, then de-gendering caregiving must be a primary goal of gender diversity strategy. This means we need to find ways to help men 'lean into care' not just women lean into work. The FWC exposed a complex but consistent interdependence between partners and their respective relationships with the workplace. Creating gender equal outcomes is not about creating ~~more power programs for women in isolation to other strategies that can promote a more balanced~~ for women but about a fairer exchange of power and resources between men and women at work and at home. Understanding this interdependence relies on measures that capture issues from both perspectives.

About the Author

Samone McCurdy is a Researcher and Educator at Monash University – Department of Social Work. She holds post graduate degrees in Psychology and Social Work and is presently concluding her PhD. Samone teaches into into the ~~the masters and undergraduate social work programs at Monash with particular focus in the Social~~ Policy, Research and Leadership units, ~~in the masters and undergraduate social work programs at Monash~~. She is part of the Gender, Leadership and Social Sustainability (GLASS) Research Unit and sits on the steering committee for the Social Inclusion and Social Sustainability Research Unit (SISPRU)

Samone completed her honours study examining social workers' experiences of sexual harassment and workplace bullying in Human Service Organisations – winning the Peter Boss Award for outstanding academic achievement. Her PhD study, *Fathers', Work and Care: Opt Out or Lock Out?* builds on her interest and expertise in gender, policy and employment. ~~It examines the barriers to caregiving for primary earner fathers and it relationships with women's wider gender equality.~~

Samone has over 15 years' experience in Employee Engagement, Industrial Relations and Workplace Diversity. She ~~has providesprovided~~ ~~–strategic~~ HR and Gender Diversity advice and training within large-scale private enterprise, SME and public sector organisations. She is the recipient of several scholarships and awards including the Monash University Jubilee Honours Scholarship (2010), APA PhD Research Scholarship and Faculty of Medicine Post Graduate Awards for Academic Achievement (2011).

End Notes

- ¹ The importance of profit and loss experience has been noted for some time. Women are often more concentrated in functional divisions rather than profit and loss areas. See recent research by Catalyst – “Good Intentions, Imperfect Execution? Women Get Fewer of the ‘Hot’ Jobs Needed to Advance” (2012), Catalyst, New York. http://www.catalyst.org/system/files/Good_Intentions_Imperfect_Execution_Women_Get_Fewer_of_the_Hot_Jobs_Needed_to_Advance.pdf (Viewed 29 November 2014).
- ² [Whitehouse, G, Diamond, C & Baird, M. "Fathers use of Leave in Australia" " Community, Work and Family 10.4 \(2007\): 387-407.](#)
- ³ See “Families in Australia,” Department of the Prime Minister and Cabinet, Canberra (2008, p. 85).
- ⁴ Haas, L, and P Hwang. "The Impact of Taking Parental Leave on Fathers' Participation in Childcare and Relationships with Children: Lessons from Sweden." *Community, Work & Family* 11.1 (2008): 85–104.
- ⁵ Workplace Diversity and Inclusion Strategy 2011–15 – Empowering everyone to make their mark. Department of Human Services (2011, p. 5). At <http://www.humanservices.gov.au/spw/corporate/careers/resources/8378-workplace-diversity-inclusion/8378-1203en.pdf>. (Viewed 29 November 2014).
- ⁶ Jayne, Michele E, and Robert L. Dipboye. "Leveraging diversity to improve business performance: Research findings and recommendations for organizations." *Human resource management* 43.4 (2004): 409-424. ~~Curtis, Curtis~~, Ellen Foster, and Janice L. Dreachslin. "Integrative literature review: diversity management interventions and organizational performance: a synthesis of current literature." *Human Resource Development Review* 7.1 (2008): 107-134.
- ⁷ For a sound literature review of these and empirical review of the evidence see Cunningham, G. "Creating and sustaining gender diversity in sport organizations." *Sex Roles* 58.1-2 (2008): 136-145.
- ⁸ Davidson, V & Gravestock, R. "CEO Succession in Australia & the first Chief Executive First Year." *Strategy &*. At http://www.strategyand.pwc.com/media/file/Strategyand_CEO-Succession-in-Australia.pdf. (Viewed 24 July 2015).
- ⁹ See Martin, B, et al. "Paid parental leave evaluation: Phase 2 report." (2013, viii). At https://www.dss.gov.au/sites/default/files/documents/06_2012/op44.pdf. (Viewed 15 June 2014)
- ¹⁰ -In the majority of two-parent, working families non replacement rates of pay reconcile to a financial loss for most families given women’s lower average earnings even for comparable jobs. Thus not only does the architecture of the current and proposed policy reflect a maternal model of primary care, through the compensation structures alone, they actively impose it. It is the very model of Paid Parental Leave that fathers in the FWC study reported would make them less likely to take up the leave to be the primary carer.
- ¹¹ Fletcher, Richard J., Stephen Matthey, and Christopher G. Marley. "Addressing depression and anxiety among new fathers." *Medical Journal of Australia* 185.8 (2006): 461.
- ¹² *Ibid*

Appendix 1:

Summary of the Fathers Work and Care Study: Opt out or Lock Out?

The Fathers', Work and Care study explored the work and family experiences of primary earner fathers in the Australian workplace.

The Fathers', Work and Care (FWC) study draws on survey data from 951 fathers and semi-structured interviews with 14 couples parenting at least one preschool child in the home. The sample comprised of working fathers from public sector employers along with a small sample from a large, professional services firm. All fathers in the study were the primary earners in their household at the time of survey.

Rationale

There is a paucity of research on fathers in the work and family context. Traditionally, research efforts have been centred on mothers in an attempt to understand the relationship between caregiving and women's ongoing economic and occupational disadvantage over the life course. However, we know comparatively little about men within this domain and in particular why fathers seldom participate in primary caregiving even when leave for such care is available. There is some evidence to suggest that gender ideals and more structural barriers might play a role in locking men out of primary caregiving. This emerges most strongly over the preschool years. The precise mechanisms of these influences remain contested however and they have been largely unexplored within the Australian policy context. The FWC study responds to this gap in knowledge. It explored the following aspects of work and care from fathers' perspectives.

- Attitudes and beliefs regarding work and caregiving.
- Ideal care arrangements and policy conditions necessary for taking up a primary caregiver role.
- Current practices regarding leave taking and work related adjustments for care of preschool children.
- How fathers' explain differences between their ideal and actual caregiving arrangements.

Key Insights

- ✓ Fathers felt they should participate equally in the primary care of their children and are willing to step away from work to do so. They show a strong preference for providing parental care over formal childcare arrangements when children are young. This was especially marked when under 12 months of age.
- ✓ Lack of well-compensated leave for primary caregiving was the main barrier fathers experienced in undertaking a primary caregiving role for their children. Financial viability was the main driver of their primary care decisions. Other workplace factors also appear to play a role in the care arrangements couples make - enabling or restricting the degree of care fathers can provide.
- ✓ The work and care plans made by couples in the first twelve months following birth appear highly relevant to future patterns of caregiving and workforce participation. There was little change in primary care arrangements after the child was 12 months of age. This makes early planning for sharing care essential.
- ✓ Fathers rarely alter their overall pattern of employment after having children but do use flexible work practices to supplement existing primary care arrangements. Requests and approvals for flexibility appear to be highly variable for fathers even within the same organisation. Whilst flexibility can assist working families to manage existing work and care arrangements it does not appear to alter primary care arrangements which remain highly gendered.

Implications

Findings from the study highlight the need for public and employer policies to move beyond provision of 'gender neutral' leave to support gender equality in work and care. There is strong evidence that out-dated ideal worker and carer norms persist in contemporary workplaces. These are steeped in gender stereotypes that undermine a more substantial contribution of care from fathers, and operate in ways often left unexamined— at times by the couple, but almost certainly amongst managers and the workplace at large. The results suggest gender tailored policy is essential for fathers and particularly for primary caregiving. Working fathers are becoming increasingly frustrated by the assumptions in policy and beyond that they do not have caregiving intentions or responsibilities. For authentic gender equality to be achieved, the taken for granted assumptions regarding caregiving must be exposed in concert with policy change that actively supports and encourages fathers to pursue their aspirations for combining caregiving alongside their careers.

Summary of Results

Fathers' Attitudes and Beliefs

85% of fathers agreed they would step away from work to look after their baby for 3 months or more if there were no financial barriers.

87% agreed that each partner should have their own entitlement to Paid Parental Leave (PPL) for primary care.

Almost 90% of fathers reported they *felt pressure to earn the money for the family* yet only 33% felt it was *natural* that they be the primary breadwinner when children come along.

Only 16% of the sample felt that fathers were as accepted as carers in the workplace as mothers.

The majority of fathers (63%) reported they would be more likely to step away from the workplace to care for their child when younger than 12 months of age if formal childcare was the only other care option.

Ideal Policy Conditions – Paid Parental Leave

Just over 86% of fathers said they would be *more likely* to take PPL when paid at replacement rates of pay compared to only 10% when paid at the Federal Minimum Wage.

55% of fathers selected *replacement rates of pay* as the most necessary condition to taking up any leave to be the primary caregiver.

44% of the sample said a *leave allocation of their own* was a critical factor in consideration of PPL and imperative to the policy.

Fathers' Leave Taking and Contribution to Care

Less than 21% of fathers reported they had ever been a primary caregiver for their children in their working life.

Less than 7% of the sample who reported taking leave after the birth of their youngest preschool child did so to be the primary caregiver.

Most fathers took concurrent leave (Paid Paternity Leave) *with* their partner around the birth of their youngest preschool child.

On average fathers reported taking a total of 4.1 weeks of various leave types with their partner after birth of their youngest preschool child.

Primary Care Arrangements

From birth to 6 months of age, almost 93% of fathers reported the mother as the primary caregiver. This reduced to 66% when children were over 12 months of age.

Formal childcare accounted for only 1% of the primary care arrangements from birth to 6 months of age but increased to over 10% for children over 12 months of age.

Equal sharing of care between parents remained the same from birth. Those that started sharing tended to continue doing so but with no increase in fathers' hours of care.

Father as the primary caregiver was minimal and did not significantly change across all age groups measured by the survey (birth -6 months, 6-12 months, older than 12 months)

Influences on the Primary Care Arrangement

Financial viability was the most decisive influence for fathers on the primary caregiver arrangements across all three age spans measured by the survey (birth–6 months, 6–12 months, over 12 months).

Partner's preferences were the second most influential factor for fathers followed by *baby health*.

Fathers reported their *partner's preferences* as the main driver for their partner in primary care decisions.

Father's preferences for care did not rate significantly in the determination of primary care arrangements for either mothers or fathers.

Family Friendly Policy Provisions

Just over 82% of fathers reported using Carer's Leave and 81% used their Annual Leave for childcare purposes.

For those fathers that used flexible work practices for care, the majority (64%) reported changing start and finish times.

Fathers were more likely to *not use* any flexible work practices than use the structural flexibility options such as part-time or a compressed work week.

The rationale for applications, denial and approvals suggest flexibility as a workplace entitlement is highly subjective and largely governed by the direct manager rather than the policy.

Insights from the Interviews

The couple interviews extend and support the the survey findings. They revealed a deeper understanding of the the process of negotiating work and care arrangements amongst couples and the explicit and implicit ways the workplace influences those negotiations and primary care arrangements.

"With male, senior managers yeah, they probably see (caregiving) as a bit of a – this guy's not serious about his career. He's a bit of a cop out, a bit weak. Yeah, give him a flexible work arrangement, but he's not going to be our next boss or whatever."

(Father – Couple Interviews 2014)

- Workplace provisions (such as access to PPL and flexible work practices) are likely to establish the range of options couples have for managing work and care. This was particularly the case with fathers and the provision of any primary care through PPL.
- Direct managers appear to influence the scope and form of potential care contributions from fathers through their application and promotion of care support policies such as parental leave and flexible work practices. Other less explicit behaviours such as offhand comments and informal demonstrations of support or dissent by the manager and others in the immediate work environment also appeared to play a role.
- Mothers emerged as the principal arbiter of final caregiving arrangements; however, the care options were themselves highly constrained by their own workplace opportunities and available care from the father

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- Mothers' return to work appears to be the main catalyst for any change to primary care arrangements. Return to work decisions for mothers emerged as a complex assessment of benefits and costs of work against the quality and impact of care of the child. Many of the factors important to mothers contemplating a return to work are generated by the workplace. This includes the post-birth job level and role, remuneration vs. any childcare costs, flexibility from the workplace, pick up and drop off logistics and the likelihood of future career progress. These acted as either incentives or impediments to their return.
 - Where fathers used paid leave for primary care and or access to flexible work arrangements, mothers expressed less stress regarding their return to work. Father care was the preferred option for most mothers when they returned to work.