

Millennial Dads Making Families Happier

By Tatiana Vorozhko

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WASHINGTON - I thought I knew exactly what to expect from my husband once our first child was born.

From magazines, chats with girlfriends and an intangible but powerful force called “cultural attitude,” I learned that fathers don’t develop an interest in their children until they begin to speak and can say something of value. At that point, a good father will take his children on fishing trips or to sporting events, but that is the extent of his involvement.

Well, I was wrong.

Even before we left the hospital, my husband showed me how to change a diaper. There was so much for us to do that the bonding experience became a family affair.

He’s a great husband, but I realized he was not unique.

Most of our friends who had children around the same time found the fathers – both immigrants and American – were very involved with their children since birth. At our day care, there were as many fathers dropping off and picking up

their children as mothers. Some did more, some did less. But that depended on work and the schedules of both parents.



A man pushes a stroller carrying his 13-month-old twins as he runs the Hangzhou International Marathon, in Hangzhou, Zhejiang province, Nov. 2, 2014.

More time with families

On average, American men are spending more time today with their children than their fathers did. They perform 4.4 hours more of child-rearing and 4.6 hours more of housework per week than fathers in 1965, according to the [White House Council of Economic Advisers](#).

[Often-maligned millennials seem to be the most involved](#) with their children and have higher expectations of themselves as parents than older generations.

Men with strollers and on playgrounds are a common sight here in suburban Washington. There is a growing body of literature offering child-rearing advice to fathers. One teaches men how to work their bicep and quad muscles while simultaneously bonding with their small children.



FILE - A passenger holds a baby as he uses his laptop in Israel's Ben-Gurion International Airport near Tel Aviv, April 21, 2013. Men with strollers and on playgrounds are a more common sight now than in their father's generation.

Interestingly, every time I go to Ukraine, I see more and more young men with their children.

Ukraine study

However, according to the newly released study by the [Ukrainian Center of Social Reforms](#), 36 percent of males polled said men don't know how to care for babies. More than half, 63 percent, said they think mothers should be the only ones responsible for changing diapers, bathing and feeding a child. Only slightly more than half of Ukrainian men think they should share the workload at home equally with their wives.

While 49.3 percent of Ukrainian women say they want to share their family responsibilities equally with their spouses, only 22 percent of men think that it is a good idea, the study shows.

In Western Ukraine, 8.3 percent of men say they don't want to do anything at home at all.

Dads and housework

Several studies show that [children whose fathers share child-rearing and housework](#) are happier, have fewer emotional and behavioral issues, and are more successful in school. Kids who clean, walk a dog or cook with their dads are even more popular at school.

Researchers Scott Coltrane and Michele Adams at the University of California-Riverside looked at a national survey and found that [school-aged children who do housework with their fathers](#) are more likely to have more friends and are less likely to get in trouble with their teachers.

“When men perform domestic service for others, it teaches children cooperation and democratic family values,” Coltrane said.

Change within a generation

In developed countries, attitudes toward the role of fathers changed within one generation, as economist Ann Crittenden writes in her book, “Price of Motherhood.”

Crittenden interviewed Greger Hatt of Sweden, who said: “A lot of boys don’t meet a daytime man until they are 10 years old,” only seeing female mothers, nurses and teachers. “It is a real apartheid system.”

Hatt, a speechwriter for former Swedish Prime Minister Ingvar Carlsson, found his experience with fatherhood very different. On some days, the former prime minister asked Hatt whose turn it was to pick up his child from day care. And, Carlsson would adjust Hatt’s work schedules so he didn’t miss family responsibilities.

Why Sweden made the switch is fascinating: When Sweden had worker shortages in the 1960s, it considered a solution based on increasing immigration or bringing more mothers into the workforce.

Sweden chose mothers. The government lured women from their homes with paid maternity leave, subsidized day care, and more flexibility at work.

Despite some exceptions, writes Crittenden, the more money a woman makes, the more seriously she is taken as a professional by her own husband. Cultural habits and traditions give way to economic necessity. Even immigrant families from traditional patriarchal societies adjust: Women start making money and men start helping with the kids.

Happy Father’s Day.



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