

# STATE OF THE WORLD'S FATHERS LATIN AMERICA AND THE CARIBBEAN

| 2017 | EXECUTIVE SUMMARY |

*State of the World's Fathers: Latin America and the Caribbean* presents research about men's engagement in issues directly related to fatherhood, including caregiving and parenting tasks; child development; sexual and reproductive health; maternal, newborn, and child health; and the prevention of violence against women and children. The report examines what is known about these issues and what needs to be studied in more depth.

The report presents evidence that involving fathers in caregiving and parenting has positive implications for children, for mothers (whether they are the fathers' partners or not), and for men themselves. Involved fathers who share parenting responsibilities are key to making progress toward gender equality.

The ***State of the World's Fathers: Latin America and the Caribbean*** report is based on *State of the World's Fathers*, the first report of its kind, launched in June 2015. This report is augmented by recent research and data specifically on fatherhood in Latin America and the Caribbean (LAC).

**Gender equality in the paid labor market continues to be a challenge in the region, directly impacting the unequal gender distribution of housework and caregiving for children and other dependents.** A significant gap between men and women persists in the labor market, despite the large increase in women's participation. In the past 25 years, the rate of women's labor market participation has increased from 53 percent to 68 percent, while men's participation has remained nearly constant at 95 percent. Men are also paid higher salaries, on average, for equal work and are offered better positions.

As demonstrated by time-use surveys, these shifts in the labor market have not led to quite as significant a change in the distribution of unpaid work. **Gender gaps in time spent performing care work and housework are shrinking in LAC, but not quickly enough.**

One of every two women in LAC reports that she has left the paid labor force to perform care work and housework, as compared to only 3.2 percent of working-age men.

Along with this gender-specific division of labor, the stereotypes of a culture of machismo are still present in LAC. Gender roles in the region are still strongly linked to the traditional, two-parent family model that characterizes men as providers and breadwinners and women as housewives and caregivers. **This gender order is still passed on through families' values, traditional practices, social services staff, and public institutions**, which often convey the message that raising children is for mothers and that a father's role is to provide financially and lead the household. This idea discourages men from sharing responsibilities equally at home and from taking on involved and active roles as fathers.

**Greater participation by men in daily caregiving and parenting should be adopted as an urgent priority in LAC.** This is not merely a question of encouraging men to be nurturing and caring. This is an issue of social and economic justice. Changes are needed in policies, in systems and institutions, among service providers, within programming, and within data collection and analysis efforts.





## KEY FINDINGS

- **Involved and equitable fatherhood helps children thrive.** Studies confirm that fathers' involvement has as much of an impact on children as mothers' involvement. Fathers' participation has been linked to improved cognitive development and academic performance, improved mental health among children, empathy and social skills, and lower delinquency rates in sons.
- **Involved and equitable fatherhood allows women and girls to achieve their full potential: today and in future generations.** By sharing caregiving and household tasks, men are supporting women's participation in the labor market and society and women's equality overall. Fathers' equitable attitudes and behaviors are also passed from generation to generation: they have been shown to contribute to boys' acceptance of gender equality and girls' sense of autonomy and empowerment.
- **Involved and equitable fatherhood makes men happier and healthier.** Fathers who have more positive relationships with their children affirm that this relationship is one of the most important factors for their well-being and happiness. Some studies show that fathers who have close, nonviolent relationships with their children live longer, have fewer mental and physical health problems, are less likely to abuse drugs, are more productive at work, and report being happier.
- **Involved and equitable fatherhood begins with respectful participation in women's sexual and reproductive choices and assuming equal responsibility for the consequences of those choices.** Men currently dominate decision-making around sexuality, contraceptives, family size, and women's access to or use of health services. It is women, however, who bear the responsibility of pregnancy and parenting. It is important to provide comprehensive sexuality education for girls as well as boys, in order to promote their active participation as agents of change for gender equality.

- **Fathers' engagement – starting from the first prenatal visits, during pregnancy, and immediately after birth – has lasting benefits.** Fathers' involvement from pregnancy onward has positive effects on maternal health behaviors, expectant mothers' nutrition, women's use of medical services before and after birth, and the defense of women's rights during labor. Fathers' engagement from pregnancy onward strengthens their ties to their children and is associated with more active fatherhood.
- **Involved and equitable fatherhood encourages respectful parenting. For men, fatherhood is an entry point to the prevention of child abuse and of violence against women.** Harmful beliefs that link masculinity with the use of violence in intimate relationships should be counteracted by working with fathers to break down these norms. Evidence shows that children who experience child abuse and who witness violence perpetrated against their mothers have a higher likelihood of repeating those relationship patterns as adults.
- Although policy discussions increasingly recognize the importance of involved fathers, **there are still several barriers to achieving greater participation and engagement by men in parenting and in the home.** These are varied: cultural barriers such as machismo, and rigid or traditional gender norms, which allow or encourage men to become fathers without assuming any of the responsibilities of caregiving; socioeconomic barriers such as the persistent provider role and unequal salaries between men and women; institutional barriers such as services that reinforce mothers' role as caregivers and those that do not encourage men's caregiving; legal barriers such as custody arrangements and visitation in cases of separation, or where the mother and father do not live together, that do not encourage joint custody in situations where there is no history or threat of violence or abuse. LAC also lacks work-life balance policies such as long paternity leave and wide availability of childcare centers.

## RECOMMENDATIONS

- ♦ **Promote policies related to fatherhood and shared responsibility** that aim to achieve greater engagement by fathers in caregiving and parenting, improve children's development and well-being, and achieve full gender equality.
- ♦ **Create better working conditions for work-life balance,** and provide paid leave for fathers as well as mothers.
- ♦ **Institute and implement leave for fathers** that promotes their active and shared engagement in caregiving and parenting.
- ♦ **Gather and analyze data on men's involvement as fathers and caregivers and generate new evidence from programs and policies** that work to transform the distribution of unpaid care, prevent violence against women and against children, and improve health and development outcomes for women, children, and men.
- ♦ **Develop social and community campaigns to promote fathers' involvement in caregiving, parenting, and housework, and to encourage shared responsibility and nonviolence.** Design gender-transformative programs with men and boys, as well as with women and girls, that challenge patriarchal and inequitable social norms and promote positive involvement by men and fathers.
- ♦ **Develop comprehensive sexuality education programs aimed at men** to involve them in sexual and reproductive health and decision-making, in order to promote consensual decisions made without violence, including around condom use. Men should be seen as key actors in risk prevention with regard to sexually transmitted infections (including HIV and Zika), unsafe abortions, teen pregnancy, sexual assault, and violence.

- ♦ **Design father-friendly programs that use language appropriate to fathers' interests and needs, located in spaces frequented by men.**

Greater participation by men in housework, caregiving, and parenting will not solve all of the world's problems, but it will resolve those concerning an ethic of caregiving, justice, and inclusion, while questioning the patriarchy and machismo's logic of power, indifference, violence, and exclusion. A call to mobilize men is needed because fathers' engagement brings us closer to equality between women and men, while bringing greater quality of life to both fathers and their children and bringing deeper meaning to their lives.

This report examines experiences in the region, including changes that are being proposed in fatherhood policies and programs. **This process of cultural change must be accelerated and supported at every possible opportunity.**





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