

PROMOTING MALE INVOLVEMENT IN FAMILIES THROUGH POLICIES & PROGRAMS

(UNFPA: The Role of Men)

Men as well as women should be taught to see the care of children as an honourable and necessary task.

Policies and programs must be put in place which promote a realistic and fair balance of responsibility for children between men and women.

Policies and programs must be directed at changing the current situation in countries where young women are trained in home-making but not in income-generating skills, and where young men are ill-prepared for fatherhood because their society discourages them from caring for children.

Concerned leaders, governments, and NGOs must begin by confronting cultural barriers to successfully promote male involvement in the family. It is the role of policy makers to provide policies and programs that will help men participate in child care.

POLICIES THAT SUPPORT FATHERHOOD FROM THE START OF LIFE

Fathers must be involved in all programs that deal with the family including those that address pregnancy support, post-partum care and child welfare.

- Men's support for women during pregnancy and involvement in childbirth have not yet been promoted effectively despite considerable evidence of their benefits for all concerned.
- Indeed, some health facilities are set up in a way that deters men who wish to be involved from getting involved.
- Yet, programs in Jamaica, Cameroon and other countries have shown that men respond very well to efforts to involve them in the period after childbirth, for example, which is a critical time for them to support their partners and bond with their newborn children.

SUPPORTING CHILDCARE THROUGH ECONOMIC AND WORKPLACE POLICIES

Employment, economic and child care policies should support parents' necessary pursuit of livelihoods as well as their equally essential commitments to children and partners.

- Family policy must recognise that the primary reason most people work is to support their families. These are complementary, not competing, choices and the marketplace must be shaped to reflect this reality.
- The increasing prevalence of paternity leave for men, which has spread beyond the North, is also a key development. Yet, studies in the United States and Sweden have found that few men take advantage of these opportunities.
- Parental leave, for both men and women, should be a standard feature of every workplace. However, in most settings, child care is either non-existent or so inadequate that many parents have to forgo many of their children's needs just in order to support their children.

EDUCATION MATERIALS

Policies and programs are required to facilitate education for boys and men to prepare them for a broader fathering role.

- Studies have found that this kind of education, combined with experience, can strengthen the bonds between fathers and children.
- Education programs should be introduced into schools to give boys and girls experience with child care.
- Education materials about parenting should be developed for boys and men.

MEDIA ADVOCACY

The media should support Government and NGO efforts to promote and popularise a positive picture of relationships between fathers and children.

RECOMMENDED POLICIES AND PROGRAMS

- A legal and ethical framework that fosters social and economic justice in marriage and in the parent-child relationship.
- Societal norms and laws that spell out both parental and state obligations and rights when a marriage is informal or when it breaks up. Few countries have laws that spell out the rights of the partner left with the custody of children from a failed relationship.
- Provisions that support non-traditional families and encourage male involvement with children.
- Education and media that promote gender equity, responsible sexuality and reproductive choice.
- The best family policy teaches young people about responsible sexual relations, the meaning and responsibilities of marriage and other adult relationships, and the obligations entailed in parenthood. Societies should provide discussion of these subjects through schools, community programs and the media.
- Family life education should be based on real families and real life. It is especially important that girls be given the knowledge, skills and means to be financially responsible for themselves and any children they may have. Boys need to be taught that fatherhood means supporting their children financially and sharing responsibility for their care.