

# Study finds paternity leave has no impact on decision to have more children

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Existing paternity leave alone may not be enough to encourage couples to have more children, with a new study finding that fathers who took paternity leave were no more likely to have a second or third child than those who did not.

The study, led by paediatrics professor Jean Yeung from the Yong Loo Lin School of Medicine at the National University of Singapore, was based on data from 1,835 households from the Singapore Longitudinal Early Development Study.

The findings differ from those of other places like the Nordic countries, where taking paternity leave has been linked to having more children. Prof Yeung said this may be because of the relatively short duration of paternity leave here, and prevalent gender norms that position mothers as the main caregivers.

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The study called for substantive changes such as longer paternity leave, greater gender equality and a broader cultural shift towards shared parenting, flexible work arrangements and acceptance of fathers taking leave. ST FILE PHOTO

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About 24 per cent of fathers involved in the study took one week of their paternity leave, while around 48 per cent used two weeks. The remaining 28 per cent

did not use paternity leave at all.

Prof Yeung said the study found no statistically significant difference in the likelihood of couples having another child, whether fathers took one week of paternity leave, two weeks or no leave at all.

Children included in the study

were born on or after May 2013, when paternity leave was first implemented in Singapore. The youngest child included was born in 2019.

This was before Singapore officially doubled government-paid paternity leave from two to four weeks in January 2024, and made it mandatory in April 2025.

The study found that fathers with machine operator, assembler and cleaner jobs were less likely to take paternity leave.

Higher-income families were also more likely to progress to a second birth, but mothers with a bachelor's degree or higher were less likely to have a third birth.

On the lack of impact paternity leave had on subsequent births, Prof Yeung said the duration of such leave in Singapore was relatively short at two weeks at the time of the study.

Some Nordic countries, like Norway, have parental leave for up to a year.

"Those countries tend to have more egalitarian gender roles than in Singapore," she told *The Straits Times*.

One possibility is that two weeks

is still too short to change meaningfully a couple's intention to have another child, she added.

There is also unequal allocation of maternity and paternity leave in Singapore, with 16 weeks for the mother and two weeks for the father, which further reinforces the norm of mothers being the primary caregivers for young children, she said.

She added that despite women's high labour force participation rates, traditional gender-role attitudes remain prevalent, with women continuing to shoulder the bulk of domestic responsibilities.

"This unequal division of labour may increase the opportunity costs associated with having additional children for women," she said.

Other factors are long work hours and a male-dominated work culture that may further discourage fathers from taking leave and limit their involvement in childcare.

"Such institutional and cultural constraints may reduce families' perceived capacity to balance work and family responsibilities, ultimately weakening their wil-

lingness or ability to have additional children," Prof Yeung said.

She said that to address these issues, Singapore needs to work on improving gender equality, and encourage fathers to be co-pilots in parenting and utilise more of their paternity leave.

She welcomed the Republic's recent policy changes to double paternity leave and introduce 10 weeks of shared parental leave.

She noted that the latest numbers show that about half of fathers are not using their paternity leave.

A message must also be sent to employers to promote acceptance of fathers taking leave alongside expanding flexible working arrangements, Prof Yeung said.

"Supporting work-family balance for both parents may increase fathers' opportunities to engage in daily caregiving."

Promoting gender egalitarian workplace culture may help normalise active fatherhood and encourage a more equal division of childcare and domestic responsibilities, she said.

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