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Is There Time for family: Working Men in Nairobi-Kenya

ABSTRACT

While much has been written about working mothers, the same cannot be said about working fathers. This paper sort to give an analysis of how men cope with work and their family. 600 men of all cadres were interviewed from both public and private sector using a self administered questionnaire. The data was analyzed quantitatively. From the survey for instance, when a man is asked what he does, he will most likely tell you which company he works for, give his job description and/or a description of what he does in the company. However is less likely for him to tell you he is a father or to describe his children. 42% of the men interviewed described their children and how they love to be home early and be with their children. 40% of the men indicated that they take weekends off in order to play and be with their children, 60% said it's the mothers responsibility to bring up their children. Younger workers and fathers have therefore sought to redefine their employee role, to the extent that the loyalty of previous generation no longer exists. As was indicated by 40% of the men who have changed their career did so in search of career that will enable them practice a work-to-live philosophy than a live-to-work one, and with this the dynamics of workplace and of the family is slowly changing in Kenya.

Introduction

The concept of fatherhood as argued by Symonds et al. (1996) in Western societies, fatherhood has not attained the central ideological position, which has been accrued to motherhood as men are not socialized from childhood into a role as a father. A national audit of family services in Britain concluded that: "fathers are not generally perceived to be in the mainstream of parenting" (O'Brien 2004:7), this is the same case in Nairobi Kenya where 77% of the men interviewed said their parents taught them not to take up women roles as this was against their believes. Jordan (1990) agrees and adds that men lack good role models in terms of involved partners and parents and that traditional roles are still the principal practice. Nevertheless, parental roles in recent decades have become more flexible and there is an expectation that men will extend their parenting role beyond the one of traditional breadwinner. This poses a challenge on how men will have to juggle between these two roles.

In African context the notion of fatherhood has been undergoing fundamental changes over the years. Fathers were providers and protectors in pre-colonial times. In the context of the then hierarchical and patriarchal authority systems, the father sat at the pinnacle of the pecking order followed by the eldest son, other male relatives, with women and children coming last. In reality the father was the patriarch, the symbol and custodian of the ultimate power and responsibility in the family and the community at large.

The concept of a father as the one with ultimate authority and responsibility was central to the determination of the role of men in the family and society. This resulted in patriarchy becoming the norm. From many perspectives, the system which became ingrained in African culture through patriarchy can be regarded as sexist as it discriminates against women (Masenya, 2004). However, there have been a series of important social, political and economic changes in contemporary African society that have impacted upon and caused a re-negotiation of the meaning of fatherhood. These changes include the rise of women's rights movements, an increase in the number of women in the workforce and a decrease in family size (Lupton et al. 1997; Elder 1991).

Women's paid employment outside of the home has created changes in the division of domestic labour as well as a re-organisation of childcare and parental responsibilities within the home and family. Nevertheless, Fagan (1996) argues that men in Kenya work inflexible and long hours and women continue to bear the major responsibility within the home and in particular, childcare duties, which limit their ability to take up paid employment or even lessens their chances of getting training. However, social policies, such as paternity leave, are being implemented to support and encourage transforming family practices that embrace involved parenting from fathers.

Methodology

A descriptive survey design was used. The survey was done with a total of 600 respondents sampled from men working in the private sector and those employed by the government of Kenya, excluding businessmen. The businessmen were excluded simply because they are bosses of themselves and therefore might not be behaving the same characteristics of working environment as the others. Data was collected using questionnaire-Interview method which contained both closed and open ended questions. The data was analyzed using scientific Package for Social Sciences for easy presentation and report writing.

Results and discussions

Do men play their roles as fathers?

It is clear from the survey that still a big percentage (60%) of the men perform the role of providing and do not take the initiative to practice their roles as fathers, 360 men interviewed said that they would rather work extra hard to provide for their families than getting involved in the care of children. With the 40% having a passion for a better family is quite encouraging and this shows that soon the trends of fatherhood are changing in favor of family. 256 men who have changed their career attributed this to desire to provide a better life and guidance for their children. This is a strong indication that if the trend is starting to change then there is a likelihood of the African men starting to take up their roles as full time fathers especially in care of children. This compares very well with the findings by Brown & Barker, (2004) that there is a worldwide change occurring in the way men's roles in the family and the care of children are conceived which Partly emanates from the politics and scholarship of identity, partly it is prompted by the changing nature of employment associated with post-industrial economics and

globalization, as well as changes in the nature and composition of families and also the change in peoples values for life.

Men are slowly taking up the challenge of escorting their wives to maternity clinics and even to delivery, 40% of the men agreed to have escorted their wives to maternity clinics and even to delivery rooms although most of them (80%) did not witness the whole process. Of the fathers who actively participated on the whole process of pregnancy to child birth, directly showed more attachment to their children in their growth and up bringing. As much as paternity leave is available in Most of the Organizations in Kenya today only 60 (18%) men out of 357 men who have had new babies in the last five years took leave to be with their new baby, 200 (59%) men of them did not know about paternity leave and 23% which is 97 men new about paternity but choose not to take leave. Of the 60 men who took the leave only (55%) of them stayed home to actually be with new baby, and the rest (45%) took the leave to do other activities other than being home for the new baby (*See figure 1 & 2*). Reasons for these behavior varies with different individuals and different factors; those who took leave to be with new baby were aged between 23-40 years of age implying that with the younger men in this generation they are trying to take their role as parents fully while those that took it and went on to do other activities were aged between 35-55 and were not interested with childcare activities but provision activities as most (80%) of them said they took leave to supervise they businesses of constructions going on therefore to them these activities were more important than baby sitting as they termed it. These results compares well with what Lewis & Lamb, (2004) found out in their study which showed that men are generally found to have lower levels of engagement in childcare tasks.

What quality time do men spend with their children?

In the Kenyan context, the father's role is traditionally defined as breadwinner or provider. With 60% of the men interviewed still wanting to be bread winners shows that quite a big number of the men spend less time with their families especially their children. In the survey when men were told to indicate the amount of time they spend with their children both during week days and weekends, it came out clearly that they spend an average of between 0 minutes to 1 hour during the week days and between 2 hours and 4 hours during the weekends. This is due to varied reasons, some (37%) of them work in Nairobi and their families are in rural areas and therefore they only travel home once in a month or once in a while; (58%) above half of the men leave for work very early and come back very late when the children have slept or almost sleeping and there is little they can do with them; and others (5%) come a little bit early but do not want the disturbances with children because they have to catch with their newspapers and friends. Whether a manager or a cleaner, both of them spend less time with their families due to their involvement in their careers or their occupations. The managers have meetings or a lot of work which go up to very late and sometimes start very early and on the other hand the other people who in most cases live far away from their work places spend most of the time on travel, therefore leaving their house very early and getting home late. This results compares very well with what population council, (2001) found that in most parts of the world, men spend considerably less time with their children and in childcare activities than women. According to Brown & Barker, (2004) the amount of time men spend in childcare approximates the notions of 'mothering', and it is in this area

that men are frequently portrayed as 'deficient women' this can also compare well with the South African Time Use Survey show that men spend less than a tenth of the time, compared to women, performing childcare tasks for children under seven years of (Budlender, Chobokoane & Mpetsheni, 2001).

The devoted dads in Kenya seem to lack support from either side. For instance the government has not come out open in supporting them by putting in place policies that support the working men and their families, for instance the idea of paternity leave is less than a decade old in Kenya and more worse many men might not be aware of it or not sure what do with it. From the results slightly above half (65%) of the men interviewed do not know about the paternity leave its importance and or when to take it. Compared to other nations like Britain that is now implementing six months paternity leave and in Germany, where companies are required by law to give all employees up to three years parental leave and guarantee their jobs on return.

Which career is best for a family man?

Young men (ages 26-40) saw their fathers give years of unquestioning, dedicated service to their companies, often depriving their families of their presence and involvement, and themselves of the joys of parenthood and life, because of long working hours that often flowed over to weekends. The younger workers and fathers have therefore sought to redefine their employee role, to the extent that the loyalty of previous generations of fathers who belonged to the one-career-for-life generation no longer exists, Majority (90%) of the men interviewed have changed their career for one or more reasons, with 40% of those who have change their career doing it in order to create more time with family see *figure 3*. One of the respondents who works with a research institution in Nairobi on interview quoted this " I have moved from one job to another for the last five years for the sake of my family and am not ready to compromise my family for a career, my family comes first the rest will follow later I work to live and not visa vas!" this concurs with what Casper & O'Connell, (1998) found out in their study that over the past three decades there have been a number of increasingly rapid changes in workplace, these changes have been fueled by the unstoppable pressures of globalization which has confronted a younger generation of workers who were not raised during these wars.

This, together with the increasing global shortage of talent, has caused a shift in bargaining power away from the employer into the hands of employees with the 'smart talent'. Over recent times, employers who want to acquire the services to top-rate talent have to look for ways to attract and retain these people. As the conflicts and challenges that working fathers face in finding and maintaing a balance between building a successful career and rearing well-adjusted and secure children start to impact on fathers' performance in the workplace, businesses will begin to count the cost of lost productivity and lost talent.

Conclusion

Time men spend with their children is minimal due to varied reasons. Sometimes is a struggle to get it due to the pressures at work place; some men have not allowed themselves to change with the changes that are taking place, they still want to stick by

their original cultural believes that children belong to their mother and they are just but providers; and most men are not aware or may be keen about the full role of a father and lastly but not least the Government has not come out clear in support of men activities that favor men compared to how it has in support of women. In Kenya and may be in most African countries campaigns need to be done to boost awareness of the benefits existing for men and educate them on how to use this chances for the betterment of both their career and family.

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Figure 1: Taking paternity leave

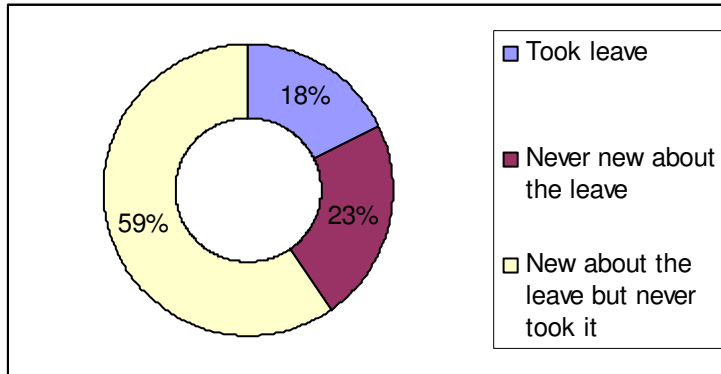


Figure 2: Use of Paternity leave taken

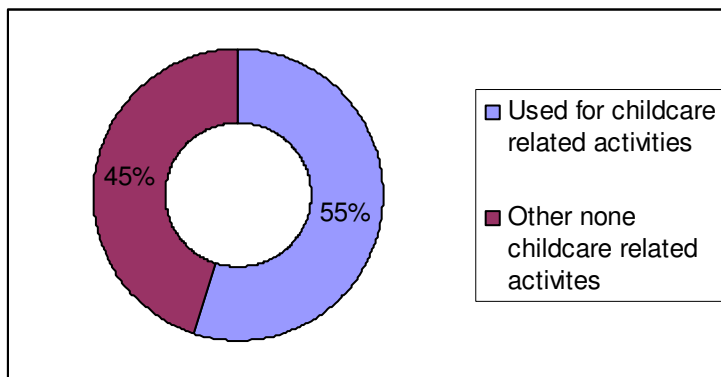


Figure 3: Reasons for changing career

