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Dads still give fewer hours at home than moms. But they also get less.

BY KELLY JEAN KELLY KKELLY@POSTANDCOURIER.COM
1 MIN AGO

Robert Davis plays with his son, Theo, at their Columbia home on May 18, 2023. John A. Carlos II/Special to The Post and Courier
JOHN A. CARLOS II

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COLUMBIA — Until recently, Robert Davis didn't put much thought into the kind of father he wanted to be.

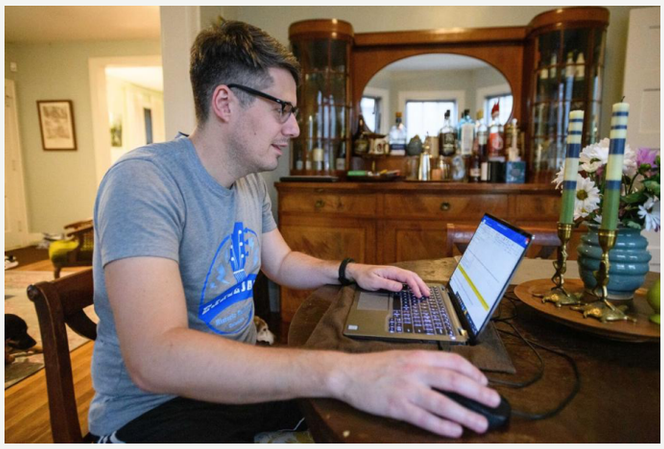
His own dad, a Navy sailor who later joined Westinghouse, left for work before his children woke up. Mom stayed home with the kids. She had dinner on the table by 6, then the family spent a little time together before bed.

That arrangement — male breadwinner, female caregiver — had been the model for a majority of married couples for **only four decades**, from 1920 to 1960.

But the Ozzie-and-Harriet image stuck.

"A normal, typical American '90s family," Davis called the way he grew up.

In 2018, when he learned his wife, a nonprofit executive, was pregnant, he arranged to take a few days paid leave from his state government job to greet his newborn. Since he was permitted to use only 10 sick days for caregiving, he figured he would pick up another week after his in-laws left.



Robert Davis answers emails at his Columbia home on May 18, 2023. John A. Carlos II/Special to The Post and Courier

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Then everything went off the rails.

First the baby got stuck during labor.

His wife had a C-section and delivered a healthy boy, but her blood pressure dropped. She became anemic. Later, she developed an infection.

Then the baby stopped eating.

Meanwhile, Davis had to finagle a month away from his job so he could take care of his family. "You're really holding on for dear life," Davis said.

Although his situation was extreme, it wasn't so unusual.

On the one hand, expectations for men in domestic life have grown dramatically in the last 50 years. Fathers spend an **increasing amount of time** taking care of children and doing household chores, and their role has expanded: less sole breadwinner, more teacher and comforter.

On the other hand, structures to support male caregiving remain limited.

"A majority of Americans say that society values men's contributions at work more than their contributions at home," the Pew Research Center **confirmed** in April.

Davis' public testimony about how much he was needed at home after the difficult birth of his son helped persuade South Carolina lawmakers to pass a bill providing parental paid leave to state employees. The new policy took effect Oct. 1. Charleston has since followed suit with a similar bill for city employees, as has the **state's education system**.

But the legislation still makes a distinction between a primary care provider and a secondary one. More often than not in heterosexual couples, the secondary caregiver is the man.

PALMETTO POLITICS

New SC law makes it easier for military families with school-aged children moving into state

BY SEANNA ADCOX SADCOX@POSTANDCOURIER.COM

A step in the right direction

Fatherhood advocates at the national level bristle at the primary, secondary distinction.

For one thing, it's not practical, said Brad Harrington, executive director of the Boston College Center for Work and Family. Many parents shift responsibilities month to month or even week to week.

In addition, the distinction can set women back.

"If you say you're trying to promote women but then you discourage men from taking leave or working more flexibly, you're talking out of both sides of your mouth," Harrington said.

In other words, the more men can contribute on the home front, the more likely women can succeed on the work front.

Gary Barker, leader of a Washington, D.C.-based center called Equimundo, said the secondary label lowers expectations for fathers. Despite the fact that men are doing more at home than they used to, they are still doing **less than women**.

But Davis praised South Carolina's lopsided legislation as a step in the right direction.

"Fifteen years ago, would we have seen something like this? Even 10 years ago?" he asked.

Ashley Lidow, a director at the Women's Rights and Empowerment Network, also called it a win. She noted the legislation marks the first time a Southeastern state legislature passed such a robust parental paid leave law.

Perhaps in the future, paid time off can be the same for both parents, Lidow said. In her experience, men like Davis, integral to their families' functioning, are becoming more common.

But even if some individuals have embraced men's importance at home, she said, society has not caught up.

HILTON HEAD

SC families forced to wait years to get therapy for children with autism

BY MICHAEL CUGLIETTA MCUGLIETTA@POSTANDCOURIER.COM

Fatherlessness

No one needs to tell Karriem Edwards about the hurdles dads face.

“Inflation is going up, there’s threat of another recession,” he said. A former track coach, Edwards hardly seemed able to stay in his chair at the nonprofit South Carolina Center for Fathers and Families. The organization’s president jumped to his feet and shifted from one long leg to the other.

“Cost of raising a child is estimated to be $300,000 from birth to college.”

Karriem Edwards, president of the South Carolina Center for Fathers and Families, talks about a quote in the lobby of the center’s Columbia office on May 18, 2023. John A. Carlos II/Special to The Post and Courier

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He paced around his office in Columbia, a windowless room a few miles from the S.C. Statehouse, speaking as if the troubles of the fathers his organization serves were his own.

“Our dads owe about $400 a month in child support, but their average earning is about $800.”

Edwards shook his head. Although his face looked young, his hair was going gray, perhaps from worry.

The men he had on his mind were in a different situation than Davis and his spouse, among the more than 322,000 South Carolina married couples who live with children.

Instead, Edwards was focused on the 50,000 or so fathers in the state who, for one reason or another, are separated from their offspring. The first thing he would do is help them meet their financial obligations. A realist, Edwards accepts child support as the ticket many dads must punch in order to engage with their kids.

But money is just the low-hanging fruit. What Edwards and many other fatherhood advocates would like dads to have is something more profound: encouragement.

"When I go to our local organizations and talk to a dad, I usually try to wear a suit, shine my shoes," Edwards said. "I'll say, 'I want to congratulate you because you're making an effort to be in the life of your child.'"

A motivating message is important, he believes, because the men who come through the center's programs are dealing with hard times. They've been ordered to come by a court, or chosen to come to look for a job or join a support group.

If they can make it through, achieving some stability, Edwards sees cascading benefits to children and communities.

"He becomes a taxpayer, possibly a homeowner. He's taking care of his child. They're not on free lunch, and they're eating balanced, healthy meals. They probably have braces," he said.

Yet organizations reconnecting fathers with their kids are few and far between. One reason is that dads — especially those with low incomes — are **commonly portrayed** as deadbeat or disengaged anyway.

"It's almost the assumption that the dad is not there," Edwards said.

Overlooking fathers came so naturally, even he had done it.

A few years ago, he was leading a youth development program. The club organized big things for the second Sunday in May, he said. Cards and flowers, gifts and lunches. Every year, children went home saying, "Oh, Mom, look what I made you for Mother's Day!"

But when the third Sunday of June rolled around, what did they do?

Edwards collapsed back into his chair. The air hung silent for a moment, and then he pursed his lips and whistled.

"Crickets."

PALMETTO POLITICS
SC teachers qualify for 6 weeks paid leave starting June 26 under new law
BY SEANNA ADCOX SADCOX@POSTANDCOURIER.COM

Motherhood.gov

Calling for more attention and resources for men — who usually sit at the top of the power structure — can seem counterintuitive, at best. At worst, it can feel like an affront.

Atlanta-based Kenneth Braswell, who oversees the federal government's **fatherhood.gov**, said he is used to people asking why taxpayers don't fund a **motherhood.gov**.

After all, generations of women have labored as both breadwinner and caregiver with less money or thanks for either role. As recently as 2022, women in general earned an average of 82 percent of what men earn in their paid work.

And women's unpaid work at home? "Invisible" is how it's usually described.

Speaking from his car on the way to pick up his son, Braswell acknowledged the roughly $30 million a year the Department of Health and Human Services invests in research and training for fathers can be perceived as a slight against moms.

But compared to the billions spent on health, housing, education and welfare services aimed at women and their children, his budget is tiny.

"It doesn't even show up on the radar when it comes to the totality of what the federal government invests in one parent versus the other," he said.

But, in truth, Braswell rarely even engages with the question. The topic of fathers and male partners can spark anger, he has learned.

His response is empathy.

In one hand, he holds the hurt and distrust he encounters. In the other, he holds his conviction that children need safe and equal access to both parents.

All the men who come through the government's responsible fatherhood programs are trying to be better dads, he said. They run the gamut: professional fathers, unemployed fathers, C-suite fathers, entrepreneur fathers, public servant fathers, White fathers, Black fathers, fathers of the LGBTQ community, teenage fathers, fathers of fathers.

But while he sees them as showing up, trying to demonstrate how much they care about their kids, some will see their efforts as too little, too late.

NEWS
How South Carolina ended up with an all-male Supreme Court
BY JENNIFER BERRY HAWES PROPUBLICA

Why dads do it

To convince people of the value of male caregiving, advocates offer a flurry of evidence. It improves toddlers' vocabularies; it decreases the likelihood of teen pregnancy and juvenile detention; it can lead to young people with glowing self-esteem.

It's good for women.

It's good for sex.

It's good for men's health and longevity.

But in unguarded moments, men across South Carolina who The Post and Courier interviewed didn't speak about outcomes. They spoke about happiness, and heartache and love.

Robert Davis plays with his son, Theo, at their Columbia home on May 18, 2023. John A. Carlos II/Special to The Post and Courier

JOHN A. CARLOS II

BUY NOW

In the dim office where he wages a war against fatherlessness, Edwards lit up when he talked about his two daughters. Because he lost his dad when he was 6, Edwards makes a special effort to give his girls more than what his father gave him: A shirt. Some cufflinks. His name.

He tapped his chest, a little to the left of his baby-blue tie.

"No matter what you become, you just miss having your father," he said.

A few miles away, in a brick house where the Disney+ television show "Bluey" flickered in the playroom, Davis talked about his affection not just for his son, but for parenting.

How much he liked it came as a surprise, especially given those first miserable weeks. Even after everyone's health stabilized, the baby felt like a stranger — a demanding, noncommunicative stranger.

But, after a while, Davis found himself learning Theo's rhythms; he started to enjoy bath time and bedtime and walks.

He drew the line at a baby carrier, though. "You know, the kind you wear like a backwards backpack?" Davis said. "I had one of those weird stereotypes: 'Dad doesn't wear that.'"

Then, one day, he was home alone trying to hold his son and empty the dishwasher at the same time. His arms grew more and more tired. He broke down and put on the carrier. The tasks suddenly became easier.

"Why was I afraid of that?" he thought.

An image of fatherhood he didn't even know he had seemed to dissipate. In its place, a different picture emerged, one more suited to the moment — and more satisfying to fulfill.

Kelly Jean Kelly covers Hilton Head Island and Beaufort for The Post and Courier. She's also worked as a broadcast journalist and a fellowship leader for The OpEd Project, which seeks to expand the range and diversity of voices in the public conversation.

Kelly Jean Kelly

KELLY JEAN KELLY

SIMILAR STORIES

Clemson adopts hybrid orientation model for incoming freshmen

Clemson University has changed up orientation to center around required virtual components and an optional in-person experience. **Read more**

+5

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Spring freezes devastated peach crops across the southeast, but McLeod Farms in McBee was largely spared, meaning the Pee Dee will be among the best places in the state – and the region – to find the southern staple. **Read more**

In 20 years, this SC school district banned 1 book. Then it banned 12.

The Horry County School District didn't have a history of pulling books from school libraries before 2022. **Read more**

Power failure at Columbia airport causes flight delays

Columbia Metropolitan Airport completely lost power on the airside of the terminal on June 17 and is operating off its emergency lights system. Some flights have been delayed and the airport is operating without concessions and air conditioning. **Read more**

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1. Upstate dispute over massive Confederate flag flying along I-85 gets a day in court
2. Columbia-area superintendent finalist investigated for alleged battery as Florida principal
3. Whataburger in SC? Spartanburg County is getting four
4. Nikki Haley kisses husband goodbye for yearlong Army deployment to Africa
5. New cafe owners reopen old Inman coffee shop under new name
6. Ex-Charleston milk plant site set for environmental cleanup, redevelopment
7. Daniel Island development to see new phase of riverside residential offerings
8. From SC to Slovenia, US Ambassador Harpootlian works to keep Europe united on Ukraine
9. After fatal wreck, historic Socastee Swing Bridge set to reopen by June 20
10. SC electric utilities may team up on a new Lowcountry plant to replace coal units

EDITOR'S PICKS

+4

EDITOR'S PICK

2:50 +8

EDITOR'S PICK

EDITOR'S PICK

+4

EDITOR'S PICK

Nikki Haley kisses husband goodbye for yearlong Army deployment to Africa

Emanuel Nine Memorial to break ground 8 years after deadly tragedy at Charleston church

Repeated violations of department policy no barrier for ex-Charleston County deputy

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DOGFOODDISCOVERY.COM

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CONTACT INFORMATION

The Post and Courier
148 Williman Street
Charleston, SC 29403

Phone: 843-577-7111

News tips/online questions:
newstips@postandcourier.com

Delivery/subscription questions:
subserve@postandcourier.com

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