

“IN THE NAME OF THE FATHER”:  
WORK-FAMILY CONFLICT OF ISRAELI  
MARRIED AND DIVORCED FATHERS

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### **Introduction**

Many Israeli fathers are caught in a double bind today. On the one hand, an increased number of fathers wish to be more involved in raising their children, and regard parenting as a central part of their lives (Hacker & Frenkel, 2005; Palazzari, 2007; Dowd, 2008). In addition, some fathers find themselves in a situation where they are being required to take greater part in caregiving due to various reasons, such as their partners' work commitments, divorce, or unemployment.

On the other hand, Israeli society reinforces the norm that men should identify work as a source of power and perform primarily as breadwinners. In order to do so they have to adhere to strict and mostly inflexible working norms constructed around the ideal worker model. According to this model, good and devoted workers are considered to be those who dedicate most of their time and energy to their employers, without taking time-off for family responsibilities (Frenkel, Hacker & Broida, 2011; Williams & Segal, 2003). Given that Israeli employees are "overworked" and work more hours than most of their counterparts in other industrialized countries (Renan-Barzilay, 2012; Hacker & Frenkel, 2005), many fathers find combining work and family extremely difficult. Cultural expectations continue to reinforce the notion that primary caregiving responsibilities lie with mothers, yet they have always been expected to combine caregiving with paid employment,

albeit to put caregiving before paid work (Hollander, 2007; Mironi, 2005; Frenkel, 2008). Fathers, however, are expected to function as the main providers, and, at most, “help” their wives with childrearing and household chores (Hollander, 2007).

Israeli scholars are used to examining and analyzing the work-family dilemma by focusing primarily on the difficulties working mothers face when trying to reconcile between the two spheres (Stier, 2005). The difficulties and dilemmas faced by working fathers, however, have been an under-researched and widely ignored issue. This article is therefore aimed at beginning to fill this scholarly gap, examining work-family integration of fathers both normatively and empirically. Furthermore, it explores such integration as it is manifested in the lives of married fathers in comparison with their divorced counterparts. Such a comparison provides a unique analysis, and is the first of its kind in Israel, as it deals with the effect of personal status on fathers’ familial involvement as well as their work status.

The article proceeds as follows: part one reviews and analyzes current policies which were aimed at helping working parents to mitigate their multiple responsibilities; part two examines the effect of divorce on fathers’ involvement in childrearing and housework, and how such level of familial involvement influences fathers’ work status. It presents two pioneering empirical studies which investigated the correlations between familial involvement and work status of both married and divorced fathers. Part three elaborates on the studies’ implications, arguing that the new data should be taken into consideration in future work-family debates. Building upon these data, it suggests enacting the Structured Flexibility Provision (SFP), a policy proposal which allows each working parent to leave work earlier twice a week. Part four concludes that effective work-family policies should take into account the rapid changes occurring in gender norms, parental roles, and family structures. Enabling all workers to work less on certain days is a step in this direction.

### **Israeli Fathers and the Work-Family Conflict**

Fathers in many Western countries are still socially expected to be breadwinners, a norm that puts pressure on men to provide for their families financially, and rely on the wife to take care of the domestic duties (Dowd, 2005; McGinley, 2012). The social imperative of fathers to function as the primary providers is intertwined with masculinity norms, hence a man is perceived as more masculine and a better father if he earns more money (Dowd, 2010; Correll, Kelly, O’Connor & Williams, 2014). Since masculinity norms are shaped by and within institutional settings, the

workplace is fundamentally affected by masculinity norms (Williams, 2010; Cooper, 2000). Scholars have exposed that the workplace is influenced by masculine norms (McGinley, 2010), as well as constructed to support the breadwinner norm (Dowd, 2012). The breadwinner is the “ideal worker” in a sense that he is expected to be fully-committed to work and fully-available, without having almost any domestic needs or responsibilities. Other, non-work identities, such as being a good parent, life-partner, citizen, become expendable (Padavic & Ely, 2013).

Similarly, Israeli fathers are expected to function as the main providers, having less social legitimacy to combine work and child rearing than mothers do. In fact, Israeli mothers have always been expected to combine caregiving with paid employment, and there is a low legitimacy in Israel for mothers whose “only” job is to raise their children (Frenkel, 2008). Nevertheless, women’s financial contribution is supposed to provide only the second income, since they are required to put caregiving before paid work.

Israeli laws fortify the male breadwinner norm and posit fathers as “second string caregivers”, secondary to mothers. This is especially manifested in the statute pertaining to paternity leave as well as the one providing certain benefits for working parents.

### **Paternity Leave Provision**

With respect to paternity leave, while Israeli fathers are formally eligible for paid leave following the birth or adoption of a baby, only a negligible number of them have used the benefit since its enactment in 1998 (Matzner-Heruti, 2014a). According to the data collected by the National Insurance Institute in Israel, the number of fathers who have taken paternity leave has never exceeded a third of a percent in comparison with birth leaves taken by mothers (Matzner-Heruti, 2014b; Perez-Vaisvidovsky, 2013).

There are several reasons responsible for this low usage, ranging from shortcomings in the formulation of the statute, along with restrictive eligibility criteria, to a lack of social support for paternal leave. To begin with, only mothers were eligible for maternity leave at the inception of the statute, back in 1954. The Act provided mothers with twelve weeks paid maternity leave (later extended to fourteen weeks) and was amended only in 1998 to include fathers as well, postulating that mothers must take the first six weeks of the leave while the remaining eight weeks, or part of them, could be taken by either the mother or the father (Employment of Women Law, 1954). In other words, fathers have not been allocated

paternity leave of their own, but rather their leave is optional and should be taken at the mothers' expense. Yet, since the duration of paid maternity leave is fourteen weeks overall, which is a relatively short period of leave to begin with, many mothers do not want to have it shortened or "pass it over" to their partners.

Additionally, the provision includes disparate eligibility criteria for mothers and fathers. While a mother's eligibility for leave is personal and determined based on her work status alone, a father's eligibility is not determined solely on the basis of on his work status, but also upon his spouse's. He should prove that his spouse has established her eligibility for maternity leave, otherwise he cannot take the leave himself (Employment of Women Law, 1954). Evidently, such a requirement discriminates against working fathers who have paid the required amount of social security but cannot take paternity leave since their wives have not established their right for maternity leave.

Furthermore, the low usage of paternity leave could also be explained by a lack of social support for fathers to take such leave (Matzner-Heruti, 2014b). For example, no public campaign was initiated following the enactment of the provision to highlight and stress the importance of fathers' care giving role, and encourage them to use the new entitlement. Along these lines, several empirical studies have shown that fathers who take a greater part in raising their children are penalized at work. For instance, Rager's (2002) empirical research on the few Israeli fathers who took paternity leave shows that some of them encountered hostile attitudes at work upon taking such leave. The hostile attitudes were manifested in disrespectful and demeaning comments these fathers received from both employers and colleagues.

### **Parents' Benefits Provision**

The provision entitled "Parents' benefits" is part of the Employment Equal Opportunities Law (hereinafter: EEO law) enacted in 1988. The EEO law's main goal has been to fight discrimination in the workplace. In addition to prohibiting discrimination against working parents, the law also includes an affirmative provision entitled "Parents' Benefits". Similar to the process that the paternity leave provision underwent, this provision had also first been applied solely to mothers, and was amended in 1995 to include fathers as well (Matzner-Heruti, 2014a). It lists four benefits afforded to working parents, and requires employers to provide fathers with the same benefits they provide mothers with. Note, however, that the provision does not mandate employers to provide these benefits, but only requires employers

who do provide them, to do it equally for both mothers and fathers. The closed list of benefits includes: a worker’s ability to take time-off work due to a child’s illness; a working parent’s eligibility to work a shortened day; a working parent’s eligibility to use an on-site employer-provided daycare center; or to receive the employer’s subsidy for daycare expenses.

Nevertheless, the provision differentiates between mothers and fathers with regard to their eligibility: in order for a father to use one (or more) of his employer-provided parental benefits he must show that (1) his spouse is gainfully employed rather than working as a housewife; and (2) she has not made use of the right herself (Matzner-Heruti, 2014a). Thus, a working father could not use parental benefits, even if his female colleagues are entitled to them, in case his spouse is unemployed. In the opposite scenario, however, when the mother works and the father is unemployed, the mother would still be entitled to use her employer-provided parental benefits.

Several fathers sued their employers claiming that the latter had refused to allow them to use certain legal benefits even though their female colleagues were allowed to use them (Matzner-Heruti, 2014a). Most of the cases were brought by fathers arguing they had been eligible to work a shortened day but were not allowed to do so by their employers. For example, in the case of *Yahav v. State of Israel* (1999), the plaintiff, a police officer, had asked to use the shortened working day provision and work an hour less every day. He claimed that mother-officers with young children who work at his police department were allowed to work a shortened day, and since he had young children as well, he should be equally allowed the same right. The defendant (the police) argued that according to the provision, the plaintiff would be able to use the benefit only if his spouse were an employee eligible for the benefit at her workplace, and did not use it. And since the plaintiff’s spouse is self-employed, the provision is irrelevant for her and thus she cannot “transfer” the benefit to her partner.

The regional labor court of Tel-Aviv as well as the National Labor Court ruled in favor of the plaintiff, deciding that fathers whose spouses are self-employed are also eligible to use the provision. Yet, the courts’ reasons for enabling fathers to work an hour less had nothing to do with strengthening fathers’ caregiving role. Instead, the courts ruled in favor of the plaintiff in order to strengthen his spouse, and other working mothers, to extend their working hours. By working longer hours, the courts stated, women could attain equality in the workplace: “we chose an expansive interpretation [of the law] in order to enable as many working women as possible to extend their working hours without hurting their children” (*Yahav v. State of Israel*, 1999). Furthermore, the courts perceived father

care as voluntary rather than as a duty and obligation: “this woman, whose husband is willing to return home early and care for the children, can invest time and resources in her work and career, without feeling that she is neglecting her children” (Yahav v. State of Israel, 1999).

The courts described the plaintiff as “a man who is willing to give up his career while his wife succeeds in her work” (Yahav v. State of Israel, 1999). According to the judges, a father who works an hour less while his children are young and need his care, practically “gives up his career”. This view reinforces the ideal worker model as it implies that putting in more hours at work is a requisite to success and/or promotion. The ideal worker is usually perceived as a man given the gendered allocation of men as breadwinners and women as caregivers. However, the courts now encourage mothers to increase the hours they work, like men, if they want to attain gender equality in the workplace (Matzner-Heruti, 2014a).

In conclusion, the social norms that view fathers as secondary caregivers are manifested in several statutes which list a different set of eligibility criteria for mothers than for fathers. While mothers are regarded as the primary caregivers, fathers have only a residual role in raising their children. This is partly because Israeli society, including judges and employers, views nurturing as a mother’s role which strengthens fathers’ status and identity as breadwinners. By the same token, being engaged in childrearing is regarded as voluntary and optional for Israeli fathers and not as part of their identity as men. Notably, work-family policies as well as employers’ and courts’ attitudes depict fathers as secondary caregivers, conveying the message that each parent is assigned a role in the heterosexual family: mothers as primary caregivers and fathers as primary breadwinners.

But what happens when the family is deconstructed following the couple’s divorce and the gendered order loses its relevance? The next part will examine the effect of divorce on fathers’ familial involvement, their work habits, and their ability to combine work and family (often conflicting) responsibilities.

### **The Effect of Divorce on the Work-Family Integration of Fathers**

Research on the role of the non-custodial father and his relationship with his children after divorce has produced ambiguous data. On the one hand, some evidence shows that non-custodial fathers maintain little connection with their children, if at all (Cheadle, Amato & King, 2010). Furthermore, fathers who maintain some kind of connection with their children find it

difficult to perform their parental role as educators as well as to provide their children with emotional support (Stewart, 1999). Along these lines, studies have shown that in some cases, the father-child relationship involves mainly entertaining and fun activities including buying gifts (Stone, 2007). Scholars have dubbed these fathers as “Disneyland fathers”, and provided several explanations for this phenomenon (Stewart, 1999). First, because of environmental difficulties, such as lack of comfortable accommodation, many of the father-child encounters take place outdoors and not in the homey environment, thus the father cannot maintain a normal and regular routine with the children (Furstenberg, 1988). Second, some of the fathers are inexperienced in communicating with their children, and therefore mostly arrange immediate fun activities instead of investing time in education. Third, as some fathers have guilt feelings towards their children, they try to compensate them for the pain and suffering they might be enduring due to the divorce (Stewart, 1999).

On the other hand, several other studies have demonstrated that meeting routinely after divorce is typified in an active involvement of fathers in their children’s lives (Juby et al., 2007). Taking on the paternal role is exemplified by activities pertaining to school, physical care, playing, setting boundaries and providing emotional support (Whiteside & Becker, 2005). What is more, some fathers who had not been involved in caretaking prior to the divorce became more involved following it (Arendell, 1995). This modified behavior can be explained by the change in their paternal role, causing these fathers to take more time-off work to be with their children compared with the time-off they took while they were married (Amato & Dorius, 2010).

With regards Israel, there is a lack of scholarly information on the effect of marital status on the level of fathers’ investment in the family, as well as on the effect of such investment on their work success. The aforementioned studies are therefore aimed at beginning to fill this scholarly gap. The following sections elaborate on two studies which shed light on fathers’ investment in the family following divorce and its effect on their work habits and success.

### **Presenting the Studies**

To begin with, work-family integration of fathers is not static but rather changes according to social and legal arrangements, including family status, socio-demographic status, and life circumstances. Therefore, the main goal of the studies was to examine the changes that have occurred in the roles of fathers as caregivers and workers following divorce (Cohen-

Israeli, 2014). In other words, the studies investigated the linkage between family status and investment in the family, as well as between investment in the family and work success among married and divorced fathers. The two studies used both quantitative and qualitative methods.

In the quantitative study [hereinafter “the first study”] data was collected using an on-line survey accessed and completed by 101 married and 101 divorced (non-custodial) fathers. The respondents were located via ads posted on university websites, social networks and divorce-related forums. The 202 fathers who answered the survey were from around the country, all Jewish, heterosexuals, with at least one child under the age of twelve. Most of them were professionals working in a variety of industries including engineering, medicine, high-tech, financial and legal services, and government. A few were not professionals, and occupied blue-collar positions, such as sales, truck driving and construction.

The findings (analyzed through structural equation modeling) suggest that divorced fathers invest more time in their family and are more involved in household chores as well as in hands-on child care, compared with married fathers. This greater investment of time and effort often results in lower success at work, so that they earn lower wages and have lower promotion opportunities (Cohen-Israeli, 2014; Cohen-Israeli, 2015a).

In the qualitative study [hereinafter “the second study”] semi-structured projective interviews with twenty-two divorced fathers were conducted (Cohen-Israeli, 2014; Cohen-Israeli, 2015b). The participants were non-custodial fathers between the ages of 25-65, from middle-high socio-economic class, most of them professionals belonging to the white-collar sector. All participants were Jewish, born in Israel, heterosexuals, with at least one child and divorced for the first time. The purpose of conducting the second study was to shed more light on the findings of the first study by listening to divorced fathers’ own voices. After analyzing the interviews, three common key themes emerged. First, the interviewees faced a more intense family-work conflict compared with married fathers. Second, the interviewees reported a shift in the perceived importance of work in their lives. Most of them said that the nature of their work hardly changed upon divorce, but its significance to them did: they were now willing to accept slower promotion so long as they were pleased with their parental role. Finally, divorced fathers described their parental experience as enhanced in comparison with their married days. They said that after the divorce they became more devoted and involved fathers.

The following sections elaborate on the findings, starting with discussing the associations between fathers’ level of familial investment as hinged upon their marital status variable, followed by an examination of the

associations between fathers’ level of familial investment and their work status and success. The last section reviews and investigates divorced fathers’ work-family integration.

### **The Reciprocations between Fathers’ Marital Status, Investment in the Family, and Work Success**

Data from the first study demonstrated that divorced fathers invest more in their parental role in comparison to married fathers. More than half of the divorced fathers reported a high level of involvement expressed in carrying out caregiving responsibilities including providing their children with emotional support. In addition, it has also shown that divorced fathers are more involved in certain house and childcare tasks than married fathers. These tasks include preparing food, cleaning the house, and doing laundry. These data are similar to other studies showing a high level of involvement of divorced fathers in their children’s lives (Whiteside & Becker, 2005; Amato & Rivera, 1999).

The second study has produced similar results. Most of the interviewees described their role as fathers during their marriage in a traditionally oriented sense, focusing on providing and breadwinning. They report that in spite of their intention to equally share housework and caretaking with their wives, things changed when the children were born. After the children arrived, the division of housework and caretaking became traditional and dichotomous: the father was the primary breadwinner and the mother the primary caretaker (Cohen-Israeli, 2014; Cohen-Israeli, 2015a). These findings are similar to other studies that maintain that married fathers’ desire to equally share household and caretaking with their partners is merely declarative and not fulfilled on a daily basis in reality (Plantin, 2007; Kessler, 2000; Ladge et al., 2015).

Consider the words of Alik:

We wanted a shared distribution when we got married but practically when the kids were born I worked from dusk till dawn... I was travelling a lot in the world and she took care of the children from A to Z. The only task I had was to come and eat with the children on Fridays, you can call it daddy-cash machine.

Yonatan echoed a similar pattern:

Ahh... normative division unfortunately. That means that the woman usually does the housework and the man is the provider and the one who

takes care of the difficult home tasks, such as building, hanging. I don't know if the most difficult tasks, but the heavier and masculine tasks are the man's. The delicate and educational tasks are the woman's.

These comments reveal that the paternal role is expressed through the economic support of the family. Notice that these fathers do not undermine or criticize the binary distribution of responsibilities between them and their partners, nor do they separate between the social stereotypical gendered order, and their own private beliefs.

When examining the difference between the levels of familial investment of the divorced fathers today in comparison to the time prior to their divorce, an interesting finding emerges from the two studies: divorced fathers report that they currently invest more time and energy as fathers as well as in care work than in the past, when they were still married. This finding sheds light on significant changes in the performance of fathers' role as a result of family deconstruction. Indeed, the most significant theme that came up in the interviews conducted in the second study was that the divorce has led to an increased paternal involvement, and has practically modified fathers' parental role. They now perform a diverse set of practices, such as physical care, education, emotional support and fun activities, as manifested in the words of Maoz:

We got divorced two years ago and yes, the fatherhood has changed dramatically since... Today, fatherhood is much more significant than what I felt when I was married. The divorce forced me to cope with things I didn't have to cope with in the past, such as combing hair and make braids or baking a cake... Moreover, I didn't have much quality time with the child. I had functioned as the primary breadwinner and invested more of my time at work. My divorcée has led in parenthood and I was integrated in certain things. Today, I will get out in the middle of the day to take her out of kindergarten no matter what.

Many of the interviewees still regarded their main role as breadwinners, nevertheless they also expressed their paternal role as nurturing, connected and emotionally involved. In a way, this "new fatherhood" they described does not replace traditional fatherhood, but rather adds to it. Several fathers also compared themselves to mothers, asserting that as parents they do the same as mothers:

After the divorce I'm a different father. As if I wore a different face. I wasn't like that during marriage. We talk, we see each other every day, we meet every day...I love him as only his mother can love him... Today, I don't do less than his mother does.

The fathers described a set of expectations, motivations and standards they adopted after the divorce. Some of them depicted the process of change in their fatherhood as a process of growing and evolving, as well as learning, reflecting and self-discovering. Dar’s description reveals a father who takes responsibility and is capable of facing his mistakes and tries to fix them:

I’m making amends to my fatherhood. As a divorcee I’m a better father. Following the divorce, I promised them that the fact that their parents’ marriage had failed, did not indicate that our parenthood would fail as well... the divorce has given me the right proportion to an experience I almost missed, and brought the parenthood-career balance back. Now, as I was given the chance, I’m trying to improve.

Evidently, the marital status has had a significant role in shaping the interviewed fathers’ investment in their families. How does their enhanced familial involvement affect their work success?

Data from the two studies show that divorced fathers who are more involved in caretaking attain less success at work in terms of salary and promotion. Findings from the first study showed that fathers’ salary, as well as its level of increase when being promoted at work, were negatively affected following the divorce, arguably due to the need to spend more time with children and perform housework. These data support a large amount of research demonstrating that married men enjoy the “marital wage premium”: they can acquire more market-related capital and consequently earn higher wages since their spouses take care of the domestic duties (Becker, 1991). Hence, when fathers get divorced they have to modify their human capital investment patterns in order to allocate more time for childcare and housework, which often lessens the time they can devote to work. As a result, they lose their ability to specialize in market production which often leads to lower wages.

### **Work-Family Conflict of Divorced Fathers**

Evidence from the second study showed that divorced fathers who take an active role in raising their children experience growing conflict between work demands and family responsibilities. The interviewees described their constant struggle to integrate work and family akin to “skating on thin ice” as they are required to be present in their children’s lives while also fulfilling work demands. Divorced fathers have to cope, often for the first time in their lives, with the contradictory demands of family and employers, a conflict they did not experience so intensely as married fathers

(Cohen-Israeli, 2015a). Nevertheless, more than half of the interviewees said that divorced fathers are able to integrate work and family better than married ones, partly due to the privilege they have at work. Yaron, for example, stressed that his employer allows only divorced fathers to take time-off work in order to fulfil family responsibilities:

There are days when they ask me, 'can you stay today?' I say, 'today I'm with the child.' They say 'well, again...' the same story. I say there is nothing to do. Get used to it, I don't give up on that. The world can turn upside down on the day I'm with my child. I'm with my child and won't stay at work. Actually it's a privilege for divorcees. A married worker won't receive that.

Maoz's experience is similar:

Look, Tuesdays are my time with the child. And my employer accepts that. They don't touch that and it is like the Holy of Holies. When I was home they didn't let me be a father, today I bought the right to be a father. I've told my employer 'I'm a father, I'm not willing to give it up.' He is also a father of five, but he is not a father, he is only a father on his I.D. card.

The interviewees presented various work-family strategies, including flexible work arrangements, setting new expectations with supervisors, and moving to a different position or to a new workplace. Consider also the words of Elad:

A year ago I moved into working in shifts, and modified my job as a salary calculator to a position in the security department so I could be more with my child, and also for a financial reason. Let's say that it was a combination, and I agreed to accept the financial terms of the job in order to have more time with my child. If it had been the other way around and the job had harmed the time with the child I would not have accepted it.

Crafting flexible work arrangements was mentioned by almost all interviewees as most important for achieving a manageable work-family combination, as manifested in the words of Matan:

As soon as I had gone bankrupt I immediately returned to work as an employee, which was, as I told you, what I did before I was a freelance. And my experience's advantage was that I could make sure when I received the job, I could postulate that twice a week on Mondays and Fridays I leave at 15:00 so that I can take him at 16:00, and what is left to do afterwards I continue from home.

To sum up, divorced fathers feel the mismatch between work and

family more intensely than their married counterparts. They face a new reality in which they have to find the time to invest in their family but at the same time fulfill their work requirements. The interviewees described the change both within themselves and consequently at their workplace. Nowadays, as divorced fathers, they are able to draw the line between work and family, vehemently securing their time with their children. Yet, some of the fathers admitted that they had received more legitimacy from their employers to combine work and family than their married male colleagues. Since working married fathers are expected to have a wife who is responsible for childrearing, they do not enjoy the same legitimacy when needed to adhere to their familial duties. At the same time, some of the interviewees mentioned the compromises they had to make as workers in order to secure the time with their children. While acknowledging the importance of work, they are nevertheless willing to give up promotion opportunities and higher salary in order to be with their children.

### **Implications for the Work-Family Debate and a Policy Proposal**

Findings from the two studies revealed that there is a correlation between fathers' marital status and level of investment in the family, and this investment, in turn, might affect career outcomes in negative ways. Furthermore, this scholarly work reaffirmed the notion that employees who take an active role in childrearing often pay a price at work in terms of promotion and salary. According to the literature, this “job penalty” is mainly paid by working mothers (Williams & Segal, 2003; Gornick & Meyers, 2003), yet the studies presented here emphasized a similar outcome among divorced fathers as well. Following the divorce, many fathers had encountered a work-family mismatch, and the solutions they found were similar to the solutions adopted by many working (married) mothers who restructure their work conditions to meet family needs. More profoundly, the attitude of some of the divorced fathers has changed, as they have come to regard parenting as a major responsibility in their lives, a responsibility that necessitates readjustments in their work schedules. Evidently, the new familial status has transformed the work-family conflict of divorced fathers into a pressing issue, requiring them to find ways to mitigate their responsibilities, in contrast to many married fathers, for whom such conflict remains merely theoretical. Interestingly, most of the interviewees have chosen to compromise their work status and success rather than their familial responsibilities. These data have several implications for work-family policy in general, and with respect to working

fathers in particular.

Most of the interviewees mentioned that adopting flexible work arrangements was of utmost importance for enabling them to combine work and childrearing. Indeed, a huge amount of work-family literature has stressed flexible work arrangements as one of the most effective strategies for work and family integration (Cohen-Israeli, 2015a; Lee & DeVoe, 2012; Moen, Kelly & Hill, 2011).

Several of the interviewed men have adopted what we call “structured flexibility”: a working schedule which allows them to leave work earlier once or twice (or more) a week. Therefore, on the days the divorced father needs to leave work early to pick up his children, his schedule will be set up accordingly. This arrangement enables both the employee and the employer to organize their schedules taking into account the employer’s and the employee’s needs.

Building on these findings, we argue that “structured flexibility” should be adopted for all workers, regardless of their gender and marital status. Therefore, we propose enacting the Structured Flexibility Provision (SFP) by which each worker will be able to have two days where he/she could leave work earlier. Mandating such provision means that employers will be legally obligated to allow their employees to work fewer hours on certain days. This policy proposal is suitable for the Israeli legal landscape, given the fact that Israeli laws already include some mandatory provisions, such as mandatory maternity leave (Employment of Women Law, 1954). In the following sections we consider the strengths and limitations of the SFP.

### **SFP’s Strengths and Advantages**

First, the SFP takes into account the role organizations hold in bolstering or holding back working caregivers’ ability to combine work and family. When exploring what influences workplaces to change their practices, researchers have demonstrated that organizations create policies in response to normative pressure to show that they are in compliance with new norms (Albiston, 2007). An institutional perspective puts an emphasis on changing the well-engrained practices of the workplace that often deter caregivers from fully combining work and family (Ladge et al., 2015). Therefore, the SFP mandates workplaces to adopt flexible work arrangements for all workers, and thus has the ability to fight the negative stigma attached to those workers who adhere to their familial responsibilities. As studies have shown, work-family policies, including flextime benefits, have been overall rejected by working fathers (Matos & Galinsky, 2012; Ladge et al., 2015). In fact, even if organizations have

formal work-family policies, the employers’ attitude and the workplace atmosphere are often not compatible with these policies (Albiston, 2005; Albiston, 2007). Such an informal environment may be one that conveys the message to working fathers that they cannot make use of the benefits (Albiston, 2010; Garcia, 2012). The organization’s environment can stem from traditional masculine views that caregiving responsibilities lie with mothers, and as a result, organizations can subvert the arrangements for male caregivers (Albiston, 2007). Acknowledging the power of organizations means that only a coercive policy could really help working caregivers to adhere to their familial duties. In other words, receiving legitimacy within their organization in order to fulfill their parental responsibilities is critical for workers, and such legitimacy could be achieved via the law. In this way, work-family arrangements will become part of the organizational structure and norms.

Second, legally legitimizing all working fathers to leave work earlier takes into account the effect of peer behavior on fathers’ level of familial involvement. This effect was examined in several studies which interrogated the kind of incentives fathers need to become more involved in caretaking. Fathers reported that in order for them to be more openly engaged in caretaking, other working fathers need to publicly exhibit their participation in parenting as well (Rosenblum, 2012; Gershoni, 2004). Additionally, many fathers have also adopted informal flexibility, which means being secretive about their engagement in work-family related activities (Williams, 2010; Ladge et al., 2015). In order to avoid being penalized at work as well as stigmatized by their colleagues or managers, they choose to care in secret (Williams, Blair-Loy & Berdahl, 2013). While this kind of strategy enables fathers to maintain their ideal worker façade, it does not help transform the organizational culture into a supportive one for fathers (and other caregivers). Given these dynamics, an effective work-family policy should allow and indeed force fathers and other caregivers to use it.

Third, the SFP would aid parents to divide the multiple work-family responsibilities between them. While it is mainly mothers who leave their workplace in the afternoon to pick up the children, the SFP ensures that fathers (regardless of their marital status) could do the same on certain days. As the American legal scholar Michael Selmi (2000) has argued, “creating ways for men to become more involved in child rearing could help transform the workplace so that the female model of the worker, rather than the male model, becomes the norm”. Moreover, when everyone is required to work less on specific days, employers will have to accept their employees’ familial responsibilities and would presumably stop penalizing

working caregivers (Selmi, 2000). To this end, the SFP could restructure workplace norms and gender expectations.

### **SFP's Limitations and Potential Criticism**

Arguably, the initiative has several shortcomings that should be considered. The first limitation lies in its attempt to regulate working hours in a very diverse workforce. Therefore, the implementation of the SFP must take into account the nature of the Israeli workforce along with the specific characteristics of each sector. In the white-collar sector, for example, the SFP would probably be more feasible to implement as well as very useful to its employees. Employees in this sector usually work many hours, which leaves them little or no time at all for caregiving responsibilities (Hacker & Frenkel, 2005). Yet, it should be noted that while the long working hour norm is especially prevalent in professional and managerial positions, more and more workplaces have come to adopt that norm (Renan-Barzilay, 2012). Thus, the SFP could also aid blue-collar sector workers to better integrate work and family requirements. However, the SFP might be more complicated to implement in jobs that involve working in shifts outside the traditional daytime schedule, such as hospitals and emergency services.

Evidently, employers will most likely be against such a provision which requires them to adopt flexible, albeit structured, work schedules, allegedly undermining their control over their employees' schedules. Nevertheless, the SFP would be beneficial for employers and businesses as well. As evidenced in studies exploring the effect of involved parenting on work-related outcomes, allowing working caregivers to spend more time with their families is beneficial for organizations. Enabling employees to have a more balanced schedule has proven to have a positive effect on the business bottom line. For instance, working fathers who manage to combine work and family express greater job satisfaction, are more committed to their work, and are less likely to quit (Ladge et al., 2015). Along these lines, enhancing fathers' involvement in childcare could advance mothers' ability to invest more in their work, which is also beneficial to employers who want to retain more mothers.

Another opposition would probably come from the side of the state, as some parliament members might be against it due to the fact that it interferes with employers' prerogative. Nevertheless, the SFP is similar to other protective laws in Israel that are meant to provide workers with rights and entitlements on certain circumstances, such as when they are sick (Sick Leave Law, 1976), give birth (Employment of Women Law, 1954), or need to care for family members (Sick Leave Law, 1993).

The state has an interest in this kind of policy intervention which enables employees to have a flexible working schedule, since the SFP would have a long-run positive impact on families. Helping fathers and mothers in mitigating their multiple responsibilities could prevent familial disputes arising from work-family conflicts which in turn might lead to divorce. Hence, the SFP aids to strengthen families in order to avoid the adversarial nature of divorce, including the harsh child custody process.

### Conclusion

The article examined work-family integration of Israeli married and divorced fathers, both legally and empirically. Regarding legal entitlements, paternal care is residual to maternal care, thus demonstrating that according to societal expectations, father care is secondary to mother care. This is manifested in the paternity leave provision as well as in the parents' benefits provision that differentiates between mothers' and fathers' eligibility requirements. With regards to empirical evidence, two Israeli studies have shown that there is a correlation between fathers' marital status and their level of investment in the family, and this investment, in turn, affects their work status. The data presented here have practical implications and should signal to employers that contemporary working fathers regard their fatherhood as significant and time consuming, and therefore workplace flexibility is required. The Structured Flexibility Provision proposed in this article, by which all workers will be allowed to work less on certain days, is a step in this direction. By mandating employers to allow their employees to leave work early on certain days, this policy enhances working caregivers' ability to integrate work and family. Hopefully, this provision could also contribute to the understanding that many workplace norms should be modified so as to fit to the rapid changes occurring in gender norms, parental roles, and family structures.

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