

# Contributory Parenting: A “Priceless Shift” from Indirect to Direct Parenting

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## Abstract

Parenting is a valuable investment that determines the quality of future independent life. From an evolutionary aspect, it has been well ingrained in the minds of humans as to how much resource each parent should contribute to this energy and time-consuming task. To encourage father's contribution towards parenting and reduce the stress on mother, the concept of paid paternal leave has been implemented. Mere presence of the father in terms of the quantity of time spent without much qualitative value has no benefit, but the assumption that fathers are less competent based on their lower performance might also not be acceptable. An intriguing finding has demonstrated that prolonged contact with the infant triggers a change in previously absent male parenting behavior. With incentives on one hand and associated societal stigma on the other hand, it is to be analyzed whether the purpose of true parenting by fathers is being achieved. Hence, in the concept of contributory parenting it is necessary to recognize and respect each parenting style with the ultimate benefit being passed on to the child.

**Keywords:** Contributory parenting, incentives, paternal, social stigma

Parental care is a collection of actions that adults take to care for their children. These actions may directly affect the child's survival, growth, and psychological development. It is a valuable investment that determines the quality of future independent life in all living beings. From an evolutionary aspect, each species has strategically divided parenting tasks into maternal and paternal. Since long, it has been well ingrained in the minds of humans as to how much resource each parent should contribute to this energy and time-consuming task. In the past, several hypotheses have been proposed to describe this pattern of task division between the two sexes.<sup>[1,2]</sup> Classically, fathers have been the breadwinners and mothers have been the caretakers. However, in present circumstances, where both parents are earnestly engaged in their respective professions and equally contributing to the financial well-being of the family, parenting conflicts are on the rise.

The government has recognized the importance of the father's contribution toward parenting and made provisions to make him more sensitive toward the needs of both the newborn and the mother. While not an obligation, a few major private companies have chosen to follow the government policy of paternity leave. An additional hand in taking care of not

only the newborn but also the household chores relieves the mother of much stress, which may already be present due to the postpartum effects. The realization of a combined and contributory effort will not only produce more bonding with the child and the rest of the family but also has given rise to the concept of paternity leave. This provision, if followed in both letter and spirit, can prove to be of great significance as the child gets the opportunity to approach either parent equally in an unbiased manner for all the needs.

Employers have created the facility of providing paid paternal leave in addition to the already existing maternal leave facility to care for their newborns. Such an incentive is expected to retain quality staff and improve the productivity and morale of the employees.<sup>[3]</sup> While the incentives are beneficial, it is to be analyzed whether the purpose of true parenting by fathers

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is being achieved using this facility. In some countries, the stigma associated with “paternity leaves” exists with men fearing the criticism of taking leave for parenting.<sup>[4-6]</sup> The “hunter–gatherer” mentality still dominates, making it difficult for fathers to take the necessary steps to provide their children with proper parenting.<sup>[7]</sup> Along with the criticism from some societies of involvement in parental duties, men are also expected to be the main or sole breadwinner for the family, which is aptly explained by the hunter–gatherer mentality.

As a result, mothers are being overburdened both physically and mentally with overconsumption of thought. In this entire scenario of parenting, the mere presence of the father in terms of the quantity of time spent without much qualitative value described as the “father effect” would not provide sufficient benefit. It is generally assumed that they have lower performance standards in this task, but it may not necessarily translate as less competent than mothers. While each of the parenting styles needs to be recognized and respected, it is yet to be deciphered whether it is due to lack of opportunity, circumstances, or an innate style of parenting that sometimes apparently projects fathers as less competent. In the present time, two versions of modern males have evolved, one that blindly follows the so-called tradition of fathering feels an internal barrier in assuming the new role and the other that makes every effort toward contributory parenting. Those involved in parenting tend to pave the way for similar actions in future generations. The environment so created encourages high career aspirations in their female offspring along with more likely engagement in gender-equal behaviors in their male offspring.<sup>[8]</sup> Animal models to study parenting under controlled conditions have been performed to answer some critical questions including what makes a good parent. The element of lactation has made uniparental female care the norm in humans, although many species including humans display alloparenting where parental care is provided by related family members and unrelated individuals.<sup>[9]</sup> The neurophysiology of mothering clearly demonstrates the hormonal changes in late pregnancy and the involvement of the mesocorticolimbic motivation system.<sup>[10]</sup> The release of oxytocin and dopamine leads to the long-term persistence of maternal behavior also referred to as “maternal memory.”<sup>[11]</sup> Despite new research demonstrating the role of epigenetic pathways in maternal behavior, mothering itself alters the behavior of women through altering cognition, spatial memory, and hippocampus plasticity.<sup>[12]</sup> Hormonal studies in relation to the neurobiology of fathering have been inconsistent and inconclusive.<sup>[13]</sup> An intriguing finding has demonstrated that prolonged contact with the infant triggers a change in previously absent male parenting behavior. Stimulation of the central medial preoptic area neurons and activation of galanin in the medial preoptic area induce involvement in fathering.<sup>[14]</sup> Studies of exclusion by removing the father from the biparental species have shown to have numerous and lifelong effects on offspring.<sup>[15]</sup>

Behavioral studies in animals through collaboration between researchers involved in animal and human studies are needed to

explore the deeper concepts in this field. A more comprehensive understanding of the evolution of parental care necessitates a closer look at basic life history on how males and females influence the evolution of maternal, paternal, and biparental care from an ancestral state of no care.<sup>[16]</sup> Situations like the coronavirus disease 2019 (COVID-19) in the last two years have provided opportunities for children and parents, particularly fathers to establish connections and build a strong bond. It is yet to be assessed whether COVID-19 has changed the perspectives and perceptions of parents toward parenting.

**Conclusion:** Contributory parenting is a valuable investment that is beneficial to the offspring to lead a quality future independent life that would translate into a more responsible individual of the society. Irrespective of whether parenting is direct or indirect, when done with equal involvement and responsibility by both parents, it leads to the molding of a child into a holistic human being who is emotionally, physically, and mentally strong.

Studying the interactions between environment, genetics, and epigenetic factors associated with parenting will help us understand the significance of each parent toward contributory parenting.

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