

Sharing the Burden

More Fathers on Paternity Leave

By DOUG BROWN, *Times Staff Writer*

When Anne Arthur of San Bernardino gave birth to her first child last month, it was not Anne but her husband John Arthur who took four months off from work to care for their baby.

John Arthur, a 33-year-old newspaper editor, is among a pioneering group of fathers who are taking paternity leave.

There are no figures on the number of fathers who have taken paternity leaves since they were introduced by some employers a decade ago, but the number—although still small—is growing, experts say.

Changing sexual roles and the tight job market for career-oriented women have caused more husbands to shoulder more of the burden of taking care of their newborn children, employment experts say.

"The work force is changing, with 42% of the work force now being made up of women," said Lou Custrini of the Merchants and Manufacturers Assn., which advises 2,600 companies in Southern California about labor and employee relations.

"We no longer have the man as the identifiable breadwinner and the woman as the child rearer," Gustrini said. "With future changes in the workplace and home, it is conceivable that paternity leaves could develop into a real trend."

California may be in the forefront of what has been called "The New Fatherhood." A bill now pending in the state legislature, apparently the first of its kind in the nation, would re-

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CLIFF OTTO / Los Angeles Times

John Arthur has taken a four-month paternity leave to free wife Anne to pursue her career as college teacher.

quire companies to give men up to four months of unpaid paternity leave.

Assemblyman Art Agnos (D-San Francisco) introduced the bill last month after he found there was no law to allow him to take paternity leave six months ago when his second son was born.

"I was present at the birth of my son," Agnos said. "I found it to be a profoundly emotional experience that was cut short because I had to return to work within hours of the birth. But my wife was allowed to go on maternity leave."

To find out how many fathers like Agnos are interested in paternity leave or have taken it, a comprehensive study of male parenting was launched last fall.

The \$350,000 international study, which will focus not only on this country but on such nations as Sweden, where paternity leave is most widespread, is being conducted by the Fatherhood Project of the Bank Street College of Education in New York City.

By the time the study is completed in 1983, researchers hope to know how a man's participation in child rearing is influenced not only by paternity leave but also by other company incentives and such programs as custody mediation services.

About 55% of all mothers with children under 18 have jobs outside the home, up from 30% in 1960 and a mere 10% in 1940. Among young childless couples, 80% of the wives now hold jobs, researchers have found.

Responding to these changing sexual roles, 9% of the nation's largest corporations offer formal unpaid child care leaves for fathers, according to a survey last year of Fortune's top 1,300 corporations by Catalyst, a New York research group. Another 15% are interested in offering paternity leaves, the survey found.

Please see **FATHERS**, Page 2

Continued from First Page

Among firms offering paternity leave are Procter & Gamble, AT&T and United Airlines. The Ford Foundation has gone a step further and pays employees on child-care leave full salaries for the first two months of a six-month leave of absence.

Other firms, including IBM Corp. and Dow Chemical Co., have no formal policy of paternity leave but generally allow employees to take a few months off without pay.

Among California-based firms offering formal paternity leaves are Pacific Telephone, Security Pacific National Bank and Levi Strauss.

However, at least 85% of the nation's larger corporations do not offer paternity leave, and few of the nation's small businesses offer leaves.

'Instability' Is Cited

Already Agnos' pending paternity leave legislation has met with opposition from some of California's employers. "This kind of leave would add instability to the work force," said Fred Paulin, executive vice president of the Sacramento-based California Conference of Employer Assns., whose 35-member employer associations represent a cross section of the state's employers.

"Leaves would have to be granted for arbitrary reasons," Paulin said, "and the employer would have to fill the job slot in some fashion such as paying for overtime or hiring a temporary replacement."

Added Paulin, "Nobody wants to be a bad guy, but our members have businesses to run and they want to do it with the least amount of red tape."

In the face of employer opposition, several suits have been filed since 1972 in New York and California. These suits have established the principle that if companies offer women maternity leave, then they must offer men paternity leave, said Los Angeles attorney Paul Grossman, co-author of the authoritative legal text "Employment Discrimination Law." But there is still much dispute over how generous the paternity leave benefits should be.

This dispute was highlighted in a suit recently filed in New York, where the National Broadcasting Co. was sued by a male employee claiming the company offered better maternity-leave benefits than the paternity-leave benefits.

The suit filed by Robert A. Batsche in federal court in New York City last December claimed that when Batsche's wife was about to give birth last August,

Batsche asked for a six-week unpaid leave from his job as an NBC audio engineer so he could help take care of the baby.

Batsche in his suit said he sought the leave because his wife, a Trans World Airlines stewardess, needed to return to work because she had already been on leave for eight months because of the airline's policy requiring her to take maternity leave as soon as she learned she was pregnant. To allow his wife to return to work immediately after the child's birth, the couple agreed that Batsche would take a six-week leave of absence to care for the infant.

But like many fathers attempting to take paternity leave, Batsche found that while NBC would grant him unpaid leave, the company would not guarantee him either his job or his 14 years seniority upon his return to work. Batsche refused to take paternity leave on these terms.

Instead, Batsche sought a court order requiring NBC to grant paternity leave with full job and seniority guarantees which he claimed women get. However, a federal judge ruled against Batsche.

Two Impediments

As the Batsche suit against NBC indicates, the lack of automatic job reinstatement—especially at a time when unemployment has reached the post-World War II record of 9%—is a barrier to a father taking paternity leave. Another impediment is that paternity leave is usually unpaid. Only the Ford Foundation and the Bank Street College of Education, which is conducting the Fatherhood Project, report offering paid paternity leave.

Even women, who are given medical disability leave for the birth of their children, are only paid and given the right to automatic job reinstatement when a short leave is taken. Women generally are not paid if the leave extends beyond a brief period for hospitalization and medical recovery.

In California, for example, state law requires that mothers be given up to four months of maternity leave, but state law does not require that this be paid leave.

Despite the financial sacrifice paternity leave may require, it has become a company fringe benefit which is being used by an increasing number of California workers. Among the companies in the state offering paternity leave is the Los Angeles-based Security Pacific National Bank.

Please see **FATHERS**, Page 3

Continued from Third Page

Under the bank's "new child care leave," both men and women are granted up to three months off to take care of their infants, but because paternity leave is unpaid, few men employed by Security Pacific have taken advantage of the program, said bank personnel director William Shea.

Since 1973, when the program began, only 13 men have taken paternity leave, Shea said. None has taken the full three months of leave, with most taking only a few weeks off.

"Obviously, many men are the sole breadwinners for their families, and they can't afford to take this time off," Shea said.

Like many companies, Security Pacific does not guarantee the same job on a father's return to work. Shea said this may also cause some men not to take the leave.

"If the leave is only for a couple of weeks, then the job is guaranteed," Shea said, "but if it is extended out to the full three months, the employee may be assigned to a new job depending on the needs of his department."

A more liberal job-guarantee policy is offered by the San Francisco-based Levi Strauss Co., the jeans manufacturer. A man can take off for up to two months of the five months allowed for unpaid paternity leave and still have a guaranteed job.

But Levi Strauss' job-reinstatement guarantee seems not to have made paternity leave attractive enough. Since it was first offered in 1979, only two men of the 2,280 men who work at the San Francisco headquarters have taken paternity leave.

Fear of Stigma

Even where men are guaranteed job reinstatement, as at Levi Strauss, they may still hesitate to take paternity leave for fear they may be stigmatized. "Someone taking paternity leave may suggest to his colleagues that he is not as committed to his work as he should be," said Fatherhood Project director James A. Levine.

Whether taking paternity leave at Levi Strauss would adversely affect a male's advancement is difficult to assess, said a company spokeswoman, "but I suspect that at our company, where the philosophy is to be con-

than 10% of the men eligible for the leaves have taken a month or more off.

No stigmatization or career setbacks were reported at Pacific Telephone, the California company which reports the most number of paternity leaves granted. Since the program began two years ago, 15 of the telephone company's 52,000 male employees (of a total of 117,000 employees statewide) have taken paternity leave.

Pacific Telephone's leave is also unpaid and can last up to six months. Upon return to work, the same "level" is guaranteed although not the same "job," said Pacific Telephone spokesman Jim Hendrix.

Typical of the two career families who have overcome obstacles to make use of paternity leave are Anne and John Arthur. Anne Arthur, 32, who uses her maiden name Eggebrotten (which in turn she gave to her daughter Rosamond) is in her first year of teaching English literature at Cal State San Bernardino.

Because this is her first full-time college teaching job, Eggebrotten said, she took only a week of maternity leave—in addition to the college's week of spring vacation—for fear that an extended maternity leave would jeopardize her chances for advancement in college teaching.

'Career Suicide'

"It's really hard to get on the track if you are in a field like English," Eggebrotten said. "It's even harder if you're married—and still harder if you have a child."

Eggebrotten, who has been married nearly 10 years, bases this view on her experience looking for a teaching job. She recalls that during interviews she was often asked what she would do if she got pregnant. Eggebrotten said she assured interviewers that she would not commit "career suicide" by stopping work for any extended time to have a child.

For his part, John Arthur said he is glad he took a four-month paternity leave from his job as an assistant city editor with the San Francisco Examiner. At the start of his leave last month, he moved down from San Francisco to join his wife in San Bernardino. At the end of the school year, the couple had a son.

Continued from Third Page

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It is this fear of being stigmatized and hurting chances of future salary and promotional opportunities that Swedish authorities suspect accounts for the small number of men taking advantage of that country's generous paternity leave policy, which the Fatherhood Project will study.

Since 1974, Swedish fathers and mothers have been offered paid leaves at 90% of their salary. The plan guarantees re-employment at the same salary and job level. But even with these generous benefits, fewer

than 10% of the men eligible for the leaves have taken a month or more off.

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Arthur said he had no problem getting paternity leave. The only down side, he said, is that it is unpaid leave. "But we are able to afford it. I would not be as enthusiastic if I were not able to afford it."

The reaction of family and friends, Arthur said, has been for the most part positive. "They admire me for doing such a thing," he said, "but some of the older people are a bit surprised. It's nothing particular, but you can see it in their faces. The younger people have tended to be more supportive."