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Growing Number of Dads Home with the Kids

Biggest increase among those caring for family

**FOR FURTHER INFORMATION
ON THIS REPORT:**

Gretchen Livingston, Senior Researcher
Kim Parker, Director of Social Trends Research
Caroline Klibanoff, Communications Assistant

202.419.4372

www.pewresearch.org

About This Report

This report examines the demographic characteristics of U.S. fathers who lived with their children younger than 18 in 2012 and did not work outside the home. It compares them with their counterparts in earlier years and reports on trends for this population since 1989, using U.S. Census Bureau data. In addition, it compares the characteristics of stay-at-home fathers with those of fathers who work for pay outside the home, and with stay-at-home mothers.

This report is a collaborative effort based on the input and analysis of the following individuals. Kim Parker, director of social trends research, and Claudia Deane, the center's director of research practices, provided editorial guidance. Gretchen Livingston, senior researcher, analyzed the Current Population Survey and wrote the report. D'Vera Cohn, senior writer, also reviewed the report and provided editorial guidance. Charts and tables were finalized by Eileen Patten, research analyst. Number-checking was done by Patten and Anna Brown, research assistant. The report was copy-edited by Jens Manuel Krogstad. Find related reports online at pewresearch.org/socialtrends.

Kim Parker, *Director of Social Trends Research*

Gretchen Livingston, *Senior Researcher*

Eileen Patten, *Research Analyst*

Anna Brown, *Research Assistant*

A Note on Terminology

Unless otherwise noted, “fathers,” in this report are men ages 18-69 who are living with their own children (biological, step or adopted) younger than 18.

“Stay-at-home fathers” refers to those fathers not employed for pay at all in the prior year and living at home with their children younger than 18.

“Working fathers” refers to those who worked for pay at some point in the prior year, and who were living with their children younger than 18. This includes fathers who may have worked part-time, and those who worked from home. The small share of fathers who performed unpaid work in a family business are also classified as “working fathers”.

All references to whites, blacks and Asians are to the non-Hispanic components of those populations. Asians also include Pacific Islanders. Hispanics are of any race.

“Foreign born” refers to persons born outside of the United States, including those born in Puerto Rico or other U.S. territories. “Native born” or “U.S. born” refers to persons born in the United States.

References to respondents who are “high school graduates” or who have a “high school diploma” also include those who have earned an equivalent degree, such as a GED (General Educational Development) certificate.

Poverty is based on the U.S. Census Bureau measure. This measure is defined by an income threshold that is dependent on family composition and income, adjusted for inflation. In 2012, the [official poverty threshold](#) for a family of four was \$23,283.

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Overview

BY *Gretchen Livingston*

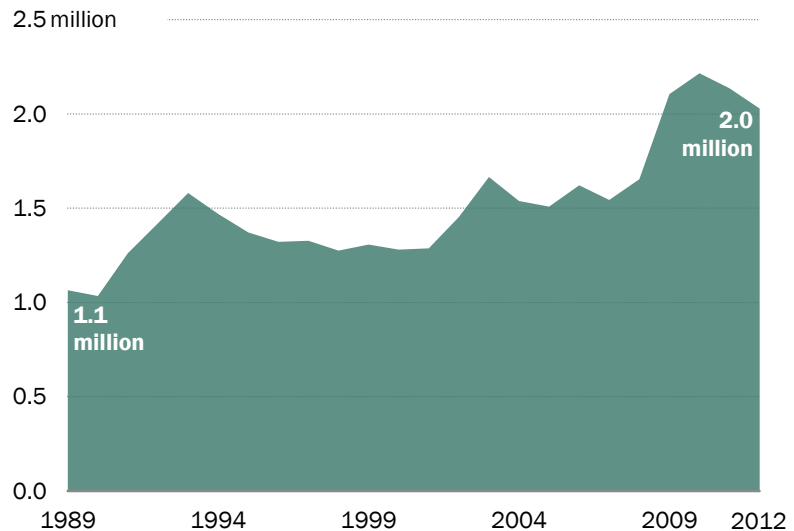
The number of fathers who do not work outside the home has risen markedly in recent years, up to 2 million in 2012.¹ High unemployment rates around the time of the Great Recession contributed to the recent increases, but the biggest contributor to *long-term* growth in these “stay-at-home fathers” is the rising number of fathers who are at home primarily to care for their family.

The number of fathers who are at home with their children for any reason has nearly doubled since 1989, when 1.1 million were in this category.² It reached its highest point—2.2 million—in 2010, just after the official end of the recession, which spanned from 2007 to 2009. Since that time, the number has fallen slightly, driven mainly by declines in unemployment, according to a new Pew Research Center analysis of U.S. Census Bureau data.³

While most stay-at-home parents are **mothers**, fathers represent a growing share of all at-home parents – 16% in 2012, up from 10% in 1989. Roughly a quarter of these stay-at-home fathers

Rising Number of Stay-at-Home Dads

Number of fathers living with child(ren) younger than 18 who do not work outside the home



Note: Based on fathers ages 18-69 with own child(ren) younger than 18 in the household. Fathers who live apart from their children are not included. Fathers are categorized based on employment status in the year prior to the survey.

Source: Pew Research Center analysis of March Current Population Surveys Integrated Public Use Microdata Series (IPUMS-CPS), 1990-2013

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¹ Analysis is based upon fathers who are ages 18-69 with their own (biological, adopted or step-) children less than 18 years of age in the household; fathers who are living apart from all of their children are not included. “Stay-at-home fathers” were not employed at all in the year prior to the survey, while “working fathers” are those who worked for pay in the prior year.

² 1989 is the first year for which reliable data on stay-at-home fathers is available.

³ The [U.S. Census Bureau](#), using a definition much more restrictive than that used here, estimates that in 2012 there were about 214,000 stay-at-home fathers in the U.S. See “About the Data” for additional details.

(23%) report that they are home mainly because they cannot find a job. Nearly as many (21%) say the main reason they are home is to care for their home or family. This represents a fourfold increase from 1989, when only 5% of stay-at-home fathers said they were home primarily to care for family.

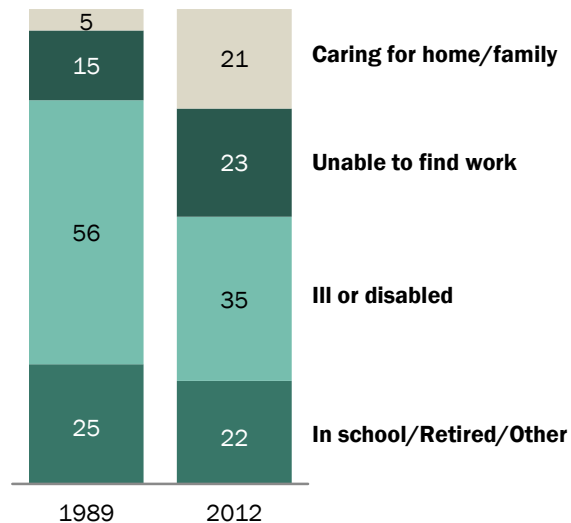
Still, the largest share of stay-at-home fathers (35%) is at home due to illness or disability. This is in sharp contrast to stay-at-home mothers, most of whom (73%) report that they are home specifically to care for their home or family⁴; just 11% are home due to their own illness or disability.

A rise in the number of stay-at-home fathers is occurring side by side with another important parenting trend of the past half century: a rising share of fathers who don't live with their children at all.⁵ About 16 percent of fathers with young children lived apart from all of their children. This report, however, focuses directly on the [vast majority of fathers](#) with children under the age of 18 who *are* living with at least one of those children. Whites are significantly more likely than blacks and Hispanics to be living with their children. Fathers with higher levels of education are also more likely than less educated dads to be living with their kids. Also worth noting: mothers are far more likely than fathers to be living with their children.

Among those fathers who live with their children, 7% did not work at all in the prior year and are categorized in this analysis as “stay-at-home” fathers. While this share has risen significantly from 4% in 1989, fathers remain far less likely than mothers to be home full time rather than in the

Growth in Stay-at-Home Fathers Driven by Those Caring for Family and Those Unable to Find Work

% of stay-at-home fathers who say they are not working because they are ...



Note: Stay-at-home fathers are based on fathers ages 18-69 with own child(ren) younger than 18 in the household who do not work outside the home. Fathers who live apart from their children are not included. Fathers are categorized based on employment status in the year prior to the survey.

Source: Pew Research Center analysis of March Current Population Surveys Integrated Public Use Microdata Series (IPUMS-CPS), 1990 and 2013

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⁴ The number of fathers at home specifically to care for home and family is 425,000, while the number of mothers at home specifically to care for home and family—7.6 million—is higher by a factor of about 18.

⁵ For more information on the profiles of fathers who live with their children, and those who live apart from their children, see Gretchen Livingston and Kim Parker, 2011. [“A Tale of Two Fathers.”](#) Washington, D.C.: Pew Research Center’s Social and Demographic Trends project, June.

workplace. A recent [Pew Research Center analysis](#) determined that 29% of mothers who live with their children are stay-at-home moms.

As is the case among mothers, stay-at-home fathers are less well-off financially and have lower educational attainment than their working counterparts. At-home fathers are twice as likely to lack a high school diploma as working fathers (22% vs. 10%). And almost half (47%) of stay-at-home fathers are living in poverty, compared with 8% of working fathers. This poverty figure is even higher than among stay-at-home mothers (34% of whom are in poverty), and may be due, in part, to the fact that stay-at-home fathers are far less likely to have a working spouse than stay-at-home mothers (50% vs. 68%) and are more likely to be ill or disabled than stay-at-home mothers (35% vs. 11%).

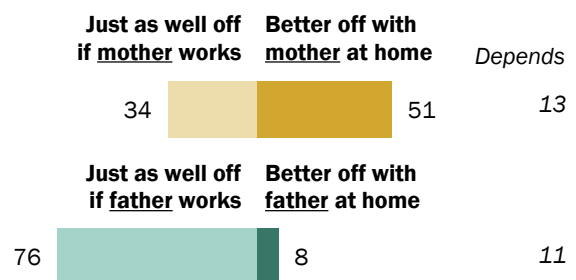
Stay-at-home fathers also tend to be older than stay-at-home mothers, which may partially explain why so many are home due to illness or disability. Just 24% of stay-at-home dads are less than 35 years of age, but 42% of stay-at-home mothers are. And stay-at-home fathers are twice as likely to be 45 years or older (43% are, compared with 21% of stay-at-home mothers).

The public is largely supportive of the idea of mothers staying at home with their children, but they place less value on having a stay-at-home father. In a [2013 Pew Research Center survey](#), fully 51% of respondents said children are better off if their mother is home and doesn't hold a job. By comparison, only 8% said children are better off if their father is home and doesn't work. On the other hand, 34% of adults said children are just as well off if their mother works, while 76% said the same about children with working fathers.

There are many potential reasons why more fathers with young children are at home these days. A [2012 Pew Research Center survey](#) found that working fathers with children under age 18 are just as likely as working mothers to say that it is difficult for them to balance the responsibilities of their job with the responsibilities of their family. In addition, roughly equal shares of working fathers (48%) and mothers (52%) said they would prefer to be at home raising their children, but they need to work because they need the income.

Public Differs on Importance of Stay-at-Home Moms and Stay-at-Home Dads

% saying children are ...



Note: The questions were asked separately for mothers and fathers. "Don't know/Refused" not shown.

Source: Pew Research Center survey, Apr. 25-28, 2013, N=1,003

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The remainder of this report analyzes the likelihood of being a stay-at-home father, as well as the reasons some fathers are at home, and the profiles of employed fathers and stay-at-home fathers. Chapter 1 highlights trends in the likelihood of being a stay-at-home father among those dads who live with their children. It also illustrates how the likelihood of being a stay-at-home father varies for different demographic groups. Chapter 2 highlights the changing reasons that fathers give for staying at home, and Chapter 3 provides profiles of both stay-at-home fathers and their working counterparts.

About the Data

Analyses of the trends and demographic characteristics of U.S. fathers who live with their children are based on data from the 1990-2013 Annual Social and Economic Supplement (ASEC) of the Current Population Survey (CPS), which is conducted jointly by the U.S. Census Bureau and the Bureau of Labor Statistics. These data are collected each March and included about 90,000 household interviews in 2013. The data were obtained from the Integrated Public Use Microdata database (IPUMS-CPS), provided by the University of Minnesota. Further information about the IPUMS is available at <http://www.ipums.org>.

The Pew Research Center analyses include all men ages 18-69 who report living with at least one of their own children (biological, step or adopted) younger than 18 years of age. Fathers are categorized as “working” or “stay-at-home” based upon their employment status during the prior year. This is generally similar to the approach adopted by the [U.S. Census Bureau](#).

However, while the Pew Research Center estimates that about 2 million fathers are stay-at-home dads, the Census Bureau, which uses a much more restrictive definition, puts that number at about [214,000](#).

While the [Census Bureau](#) limits the definition of stay-at-home fathers to those living with children (under the age of 15) who state that they are home for the entire year in order to care for home and family, the definition used here encompasses any father (of a child younger than 18) who has not worked for pay in the prior year, regardless of the reason.

Furthermore, when discussing stay-at-home parents, the Census typically limits analysis to families with a married husband and wife, where one spouse is in the labor force all of the prior year. In contrast, the definitions used here are not contingent on marital status, having a spouse or partner of the “opposite” sex, or on the work status of the spouse or partner.

Determining an optimal definition of stay-at-home fathers (and mothers) is difficult. For instance, summarily excluding fathers who are primary caregivers, but who also worked at least a few hours in the prior year may lead to an [underestimate of the actual numbers of stay-at-home fathers](#). On the other hand, some might argue that fathers who are home due to an inability to work should not be included as stay-at-home fathers, even though they may be serving as the primary caregiver. See this [qualitative analysis](#) for interesting insights on how caregiving fathers define themselves, and how various adjustments in the Census definition of stay-at-home fatherhood would affect their national estimates of stay-at-home fathers.

Chapter 1: The Likelihood of Being a Stay-at-Home Father

In 2012, two million fathers were living with at least one of their children less than 18 years of age, and had not been employed outside of the home for a year or more. This marked a 90% increase in the number of stay-at-home fathers since 1989, when 1.1 million fathers were at home with their children. While the number of stay-at-home fathers increased over this period, the number spiked to 2.2 million in the wake of the Great Recession, before declining somewhat to its present level of roughly 2 million.

Though their numbers are growing, stay-at-home fathers are still a small share of all fathers who live with their children. In 1989, 4% of these fathers were at home. That share doubled following the recession, and now stands at 7%. In comparison, the share of mothers at home dropped from 28% in 1989 to 23% in 1999, and has now risen back up to 29%.

Looking at the data a bit differently, among all stay-at-home parents in the U.S., 16% are fathers, and 84% are mothers. In 1989, just 10% of all stay-at-home parents were fathers, and 90% were mothers.

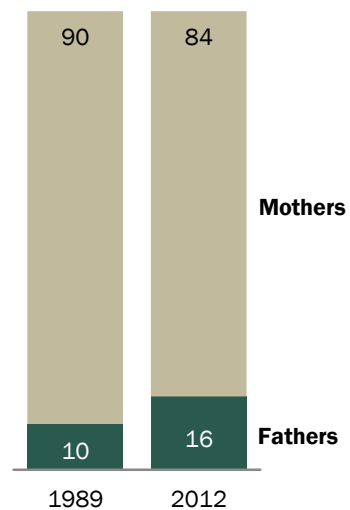
Race, Ethnicity and Nativity

Among those fathers who live with their children⁶, there are sharp differences by race and ethnicity in the share who are at home full time. Black fathers who live with their children are the most likely to be at stay-at-home fathers—fully 13% were in 2012. Among Hispanics and Asian Americans, the share is 8%; and 6% of white fathers who live with their kids are not working outside of the home.

The share of fathers at home rose among each of these groups in the wake of the recession, before declining to their present levels. The biggest increases occurred among blacks, Hispanics and Asian Americans; and a more modest increase occurred among whites. From 2007 to 2010, the

Fathers are a Small But Growing Share of Stay-at-Home Parents

% of stay-at-home parents who are ...



Note: Stay-at-home parents are based on parents ages 18-69 with own child(ren) younger than 18 in the household who do not work outside the home. Parents who live apart from their children are not included. Parents are categorized based on employment status in the year prior to the survey.

Source: Pew Research Center analysis of March Current Population Surveys Integrated Public Use Microdata Series (IPUMS-CPS), 1990 and 2013

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⁶ The likelihood that a father is living with at least one of his children varies by race and ethnicity, and by educational attainment. For more information, see Gretchen Livingston and Kim Parker, 2011. "[A Tale of Two Fathers](#)." Washington, D.C.: Pew Research Center's Social and Demographic Trends project, June.

share of black fathers living with their children who stayed home full time increased 5 percentage points, to 17%. During that same period, Hispanics and Asian Americans experienced small increases (to 9% and 10%, respectively). Among whites, the share of at-home fathers peaked at 7% in 2011, up from 5% in 2007.

The likelihood of being a stay-at-home father is similar for both native-born and foreign-born fathers. Some 8% of fathers born in the U.S. who live with their children are stay-at-home fathers, as are 7% of those who were born elsewhere. This is in contrast to the pattern in 1993 (when data by nativity were first available), when foreign-born fathers were twice as likely as the native-born to be home (10% were, as compared with 5% of the native born).

The association of race, ethnicity and nativity with the likelihood of being an at-home parent is very different among mothers. Hispanic and Asian-American mothers are the most likely to be at home (more than one-third of each are), followed by 27% of black mothers and 26% of white mothers. The high share of Asian and Hispanic stay-at-home mothers is driven, in part, by the prevalence of immigrants in these groups. While nativity isn't linked to the likelihood of staying at home for fathers, foreign-born mothers are far more likely to be at home with their children than mothers born in the U.S.

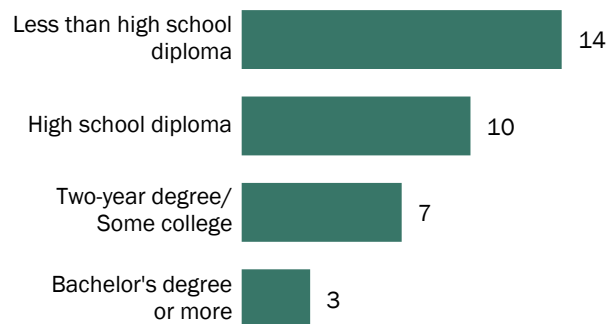
Educational Attainment

Among dads who live with their children, those with the lowest levels of education are among the most likely to be stay-at-home dads. Some 14% who lack a high school diploma are at home, as are 10% of those with a high school diploma but no further education. Among fathers with some college experience or a two-year degree, 7% are at home, while just 3% of those who have a bachelor's degree or more are not working. Similarly, among mothers, the more educated are the least likely to be at home with their children.

Since 1989, the share of fathers with no high school diploma who are stay-at-home fathers

Likelihood of Being a Stay-at-Home Father, by Educational Attainment, 2012

% of fathers living with child(ren) younger than 18 who do not work outside the home



Note: Based on fathers ages 18-69 with own child(ren) younger than 18 in the household. Fathers who live apart from their children are not included. Fathers are categorized based on employment status in the year prior to the survey. "High school diploma" includes those with its equivalent, such as a GED (General Educational Development) certificate.

Source: Pew Research Center analysis of March Current Population Surveys Integrated Public Use Microdata Series (IPUMS-CPS), 1990 and 2013

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stayed roughly the same. Increases occurred for dads with higher levels of educational attainment. The likelihood of being a stay-at-home father tripled for those with a high school degree. Among fathers with some college education or a two-year degree, the share at home rose from 3% in 1989 to 7% in 2012; and for those fathers with a bachelor's degree or more, there has been a 2-point increase since 1989, when just 1% were stay-at-home fathers.

Chapter 2: Why Are Dads Staying Home?

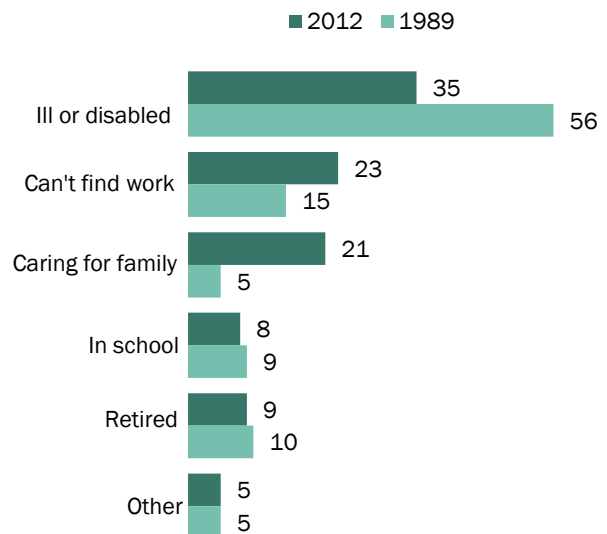
The biggest share of stay-at-home fathers is out of the workforce due to illness or disability. About one-third (35%) fall into this category. This share is down substantially from 1989, when 56% of all at-home fathers reported that they were home for this reason. The decline in this category has been supplanted by increases in the share of fathers who are home to care for their family, or because they couldn't find work.

In 2012, roughly one-in-four fathers who lived with their children (23%) reported that they were at-home because they couldn't find work. This number was 15% in 1989, fell in subsequent years, but spiked dramatically in the wake of the Great Recession; by 2010, fully one-third (32%) of at-home fathers said they were home mainly because they could not find a job. Since that time, the share of stay-at-home fathers who can't find work has been dropping notably. Smaller spikes in the prevalence of fathers who were unable to find work occurred during the recessions of the early 1990s and the early 2000s, as well.

While the inability to find work is one of the primary reasons that fathers who live with their children give for being at home, it has not been the only driver of growth in the number of at-home fathers since 1989. In fact, the biggest increase in fathers at home has been among those who are caring for their family; this number rose by 377,000 since 1989. Fully one-fifth (21%) of stay-at-home dads say that they are at home primarily to care for their family; a four-fold increase since 1989, when

Why Are Dads Staying Home?

% of stay-at-home fathers who say they are not working because they are ...



Note: Stay-at-home fathers are based on fathers ages 18-69 with own child(ren) younger than 18 in the household who do not work outside the home. Fathers who live apart from their children are not included. Fathers are categorized based on employment status in the year prior to the survey.

Source: Pew Research Center analysis of March Current Population Surveys Integrated Public Use Microdata Series (IPUMS-CPS), 1990 and 2013

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just 5% of at-home fathers said as much.⁷ This increase has been the result of steady growth across the decades.

Smaller shares of stay-at-home fathers report that they are not working either because they are in school (8%); retired (9%); or for some other reason (5%).

Unlike stay-at-home fathers, the majority (73%) of stay-at-home mothers report that they are home primarily to care for their children. Just 11% of stay-at-home mothers report that they are home due to illness or disability (compared with 35% of fathers). And 6% of stay-at-home moms say they are at home because they could not find work.

⁷ Both [quantitative](#) and [qualitative](#) research suggests that fathers who state that they are home in order to care for their children differ from those who are home due to other reasons. For instance, those home primarily to care for their children tend to have higher family incomes, are younger, and have younger children than their counterparts who are home due to illness or unemployment.

Chapter 3: How Do Stay-at-Home Dads Compare with Working Dads?

Among all fathers who live with at least one of their children, stay-at-home fathers are less well-off financially than their working counterparts. About half (47%) of fathers at home are living in poverty, compared with just 8% of those working outside of the home. The poverty rate of stay-at-home fathers is even higher than that among stay-at-home mothers (34%).

Overall, three-fourths (79%) of at-home fathers are married. Some 50% have wives who were employed during the past year, and 28% have wives who either did not work in the past year, or who were absent from the home. Another 15% of stay-at-home fathers are single, and 7% are cohabiting with a non-marital partner.⁸ While the plurality of stay-at-home fathers have a working spouse, among stay-at-home mothers, the share with a working spouse is much higher (68%)—and this may partially explain why poverty is even higher among stay-at-home fathers than stay-at-home mothers.

The high poverty rate among stay-at-home fathers may be further driven by their relatively low levels of educational attainment. More than half (58%) of fathers at home have a high school diploma or less, while this number is 36% among employed fathers. Some 22% of at-home fathers lack a diploma, as compared with 10% of employed fathers. About the same share of at-home fathers and employed fathers have

Characteristics of Stay-at-Home and Working Dads, 2012

| | % | |
|-------------------------------|--------------|---------|
| | Stay-at-Home | Working |
| Age | | |
| 16-24 | 4 | 3 |
| 25-34 | 20 | 24 |
| 35-44 | 33 | 40 |
| 45-54 | 27 | 27 |
| 55-64 | 12 | 6 |
| 65 and older | 3 | <0.5 |
| Nativity | | |
| U.S. born | 75 | 76 |
| Foreign born | 25 | 24 |
| Race/Ethnicity | | |
| White | 52 | 64 |
| Hispanic | 20 | 19 |
| Black | 16 | 9 |
| Asian | 8 | 7 |
| Educational Attainment | | |
| Less than high school diploma | 22 | 10 |
| High school diploma | 36 | 26 |
| Two-year degree/Some college | 25 | 26 |
| Bachelor's degree or more | 17 | 37 |
| Living in Poverty | 47 | 8 |

Note: Based on fathers ages 18-69 with own child(ren) younger than 18 in the household. Fathers who live apart from their children are not included. Fathers are categorized based on employment status in the year prior to the survey. Blacks, Asians and whites include only non-Hispanics. Hispanics are of any race. "High school diploma" includes those with its equivalent, such as a GED (General Educational Development) certificate.

Source: Pew Research Center analysis of March Current Population Surveys Integrated Public Use Microdata Series (IPUMS-CPS), 2013

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⁸ The small number of fathers who are in same-sex couples, regardless of whether those couples are married or cohabiting, are classified as cohabiting.

some college experience or a two-year degree, but just 17% of at-home fathers have earned a bachelor's degree, as compared with 37% of working fathers.

About half (52%) of stay-at-home fathers are white, while 20% are Hispanic, and 16% are black. By comparison, 64% of employed fathers are white, 19% are Hispanic, and 9% are black. Asians comprise 8% of at-home fathers, and 7% of working fathers. Both stay-at-home fathers and working fathers are equally likely to be foreign-born—about one-fourth are. While the race and ethnic profiles of at-home and working fathers mirrors those of mothers, the nativity profiles are different; a disproportionate share of foreign-born mothers are stay-at-home moms.

Stay-at-home fathers are quite a bit older than working fathers. While 43% of stay-at-home fathers are ages 45 years or older, this share is 33% among employed fathers. This is in stark contrast to the pattern among stay-at-home moms, who tend to be younger than their counterparts in the workforce.