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## **THE NEWBORN IN THE MILLENNIAL FAMILY - A NEW PERSPECTIVE ON THE ROLE OF THE FATHER**

NOWORODEK W RODZINIE MILLENNIALSÓW  
- NOWE SPOJRZENIE NA ROLĘ OJCA

## Abstrakt

**Wprowadzenie:** W dzisiejszych czasach niewiele lub wręcz wcale nie dyskutuje się o roli ojca millenialsów w opiece nad noworodkiem i o tym, jaki jest ich wkład w tę rolę.

**Cel:** Celem pracy jest analiza roli ojca w opiece nad noworodkiem oraz ocena, jak zmieniła się jego pozycja w rodzinie.

**Materiał i metody:** Kwestionariusz był anonimowy i poddany na losowej próbie 169 ojców noworodków i składał się z 25 pytań.

**Wyniki:** W badanej grupie 95,2% ojców wie, w którym tygodniu urodziło się ich dziecko, rośnie liczba porodów rodzinnych. Ojcowie są zaangażowani w opiekę zdrowotną nad swoim dzieckiem. Zapewniają również opiekę przedporodową, np. uczęszczają do szkoły rodzenia. Starają się spędzać coraz więcej czasu ze swoimi noworodkami.

**Wnioski:** Ojciec pokolenia millenialsów ma coraz większą wiedzę i świadomość swojej nowej roli.

## Abstract

**Introduction:** There is little or even no discussion these days about the role of the millennial father in caring for the newborn child and how they contribute to that role.

**Purpose:** The purpose of this study is to analyze the role of the father in caring for the newborn and to assess how his position in the family has changed.

**Material and methods:** A questionnaire was anonymous and administered to a random sample of 169 fathers of newborns and consist 25 questions.

**Results:** In the study group, 95.2% of fathers know in which week their baby was born, family births are increasing. Fathers are involved in health care their child. They also provide pre-natal care for example attending a birthing school. They try to spend more and more time with their newborns.

**Conclusion:** The father of the millennial generation is increasingly knowledgeable and aware of his new role.

## Background

Nowadays, the importance of mothers in caring for the newborn is much talked about and their role is very well known. In contrast, little or nothing is said about the father's role and how important he is in caring for the newborn. Historically, the father's role is seen as one in which he is the one who makes decisions and provides for the family. What does the image of a father taking care of his born child really look like? Today we are dealing with a new generation of fathers, the so-called "millenials" or Generation Y, or digital generation, who have embraced technology and are ready for new challenges. They are characterized by high self-confidence, place more importance on quality of life and experience than possessions, are more aware, think about the future and plan for the long term (Milenials: Cechy Pokolenia Y - BRIEF, n.d.). However, the father's role in caring for the newborn still belongs to niche topics, while the mother's role in this area seems to be something obvious and natural. This is evidenced by the statistics of google search records. The query "mother's role in caring for the newborn" generates 1 520 000 results, while for a similar query about the role of the father we get 48 000, which is only 3%. In the broader pop culture, it is also more common to position the mother as the one evolutionarily assigned to the role of the person who should take care of the newborn and

its needs. First of all, it should be noted that placing the father in the role of the caretaker of the newborn does not mean displacing the mother from this role. Such care takes place simultaneously and works on the principle of complementarity. So what can the father contribute? What benefits can both the father and the newborn derive from such care? The neonatal period in a child's life is a time of adjustment from birth to four weeks of age. A father's early care of his newborn directly has a significant relationship with the happiness level of the entire family. The introduction of paternity leave has influenced higher levels of father involvement in child development and care (Petts & Knoester, 2018). This also translates into the father-child relationship itself, their closeness and communication (Petts et al., 2020). The physical as well as psychological development of those children whose fathers have provided care since birth is particularly strong. The greater bond built between father and child may result in easier coping with stressful situations, better academic performance, and better social adjustment.

## Purpose of the study

The purpose of this study was to analyze the knowledge of fathers of newborns and their skills in taking care of their newborn immediately after birth and to assess the change in his position that has occurred in the family and how it is perceived by him.

## Material and Methods

The study was conducted among randomly selected 169 fathers of newborns (up to 28 days of age). The questionnaire was anonymous and consisted of 25 questions, both closed: single and multiple choice, as well as open ones. The open-ended questions included birth weight, the week the fathers found out about their partner's pregnancy, the week the baby was born, and emotions that accompanied the fathers during the pregnancy. The study was conducted in our Clinic and by posting the survey online from February to May 2022 <https://docs.google.com/forms/d/1bbjKX-u8txGTBr3YxIDtDc6CR43VfjppBFm545NWx1Q/edit?ts=61e56d68#responses>.

Fathers of newborns between the ages of 20 and 41 years with a majority of 56.9% (n=116) having higher education, 37.9% having secondary education, and 5.2% having primary education responded to the questionnaires. More than half of the study group consisted of fathers in the age range of 29 - 34 years 68.1% (n=79), with the most numerous group between 30 and 34 years of age (Table 1).

Table 1. Characteristics of the study group. Author’s own research.

Age (years)	20-24	25-29	30-34	35-41
Number	10	34	45	27
Percents (%)	8,62	29,31	38,79	23,28

Statistical analysis was performed using Statistica version 13. Results were expressed as mean +/- standard deviation for continuous variables and as numbers and percentages for categorical variables. Shapiro - Wilk test was used to assess the normality of the distribution of quantitative parameters in the study. Groups were compared using Student’s t - test or non-parametric Mann - Whitney U test depending on the distribution of the variables and chi - square or Fischer’s exact test. Pearson’s correlation coefficient or Spearman’s rank was also used for ordinal and quantitative variables. In all analyses,  $p < 0.05$  was considered a statistically significant test probability value. Full data are available from the authors of this paper.

**Results**

95.2% (n=161) of the fathers know what week their baby was born, of which 86.9% (n=140) of the newborns were born on time and 13% (n=21) were preterm. All newborns were born at normal weight. Family births are becoming more common, therefore 63.3% (n=107) of the surveyed fathers were present at the birth of their child. The majority of newborns were born by natural childbirth; however, cesarean sections still account for a large percentage of births, with the remainder being deliveries by forceps or vacuum aspiration, as shown in Figure 1. Fathers also provided antenatal care in the form of consultations with a gynecologist, midwife, and family physician, as shown in Figure 2.

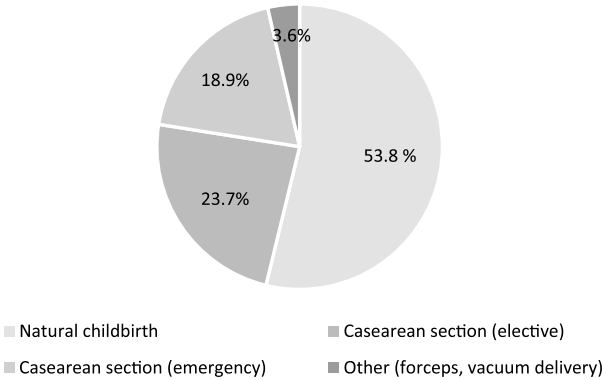


Figure 1. Types of birth. Author’s own research.

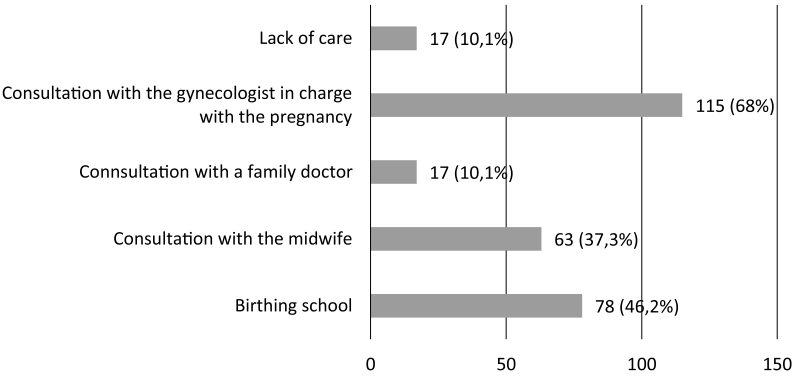


Figure 2. Pre-birth care. Author’s own research.

A large percentage attended birthing schools, which have become very popular in recent years. The emotions which most often accompanied fathers upon learning of their partner’s pregnancy (the most frequently mentioned feelings) were mainly joy, happiness and pride, but also surprise, fear or uncertainty were found. Fathers are paying more and more attention to support their partner from the very beginning of the pregnancy, which is evidenced by the fact that they found out about the pregnancy very early, most often at the 6th week 23.7% (n=40). Kangarooing of newborns is very popular 74% (n=125) especially in cases where the mother had a cesarean section and skin-to-skin contact was not possible. Fathers most often spend with their child 3 - 4 hours a day 34.4% (n=58), and 28.4% (n=48) spend with their newborn child 5 - 6 hours a day. Among the activities performed with the child, fathers bathe the child more or as often as mothers, while other activities are performed less frequently, and include feeding, singing to the child, and getting up at night. The majority of fathers (n=149) completely agree with the statement that they are “happy in their role,” “enjoy spending time with their child” (n=142), and are fulfilled in their family (n=117). Having an offspring gives fathers a more optimistic and clear vision of the future. Attitudes towards the father’s responsibilities in the family have changed. According to the respondents, the new role consists mainly of showing love to the child and taking care of its safety, but there is also often a need to provide material security or direct care for the child, as shown in Figure 3.

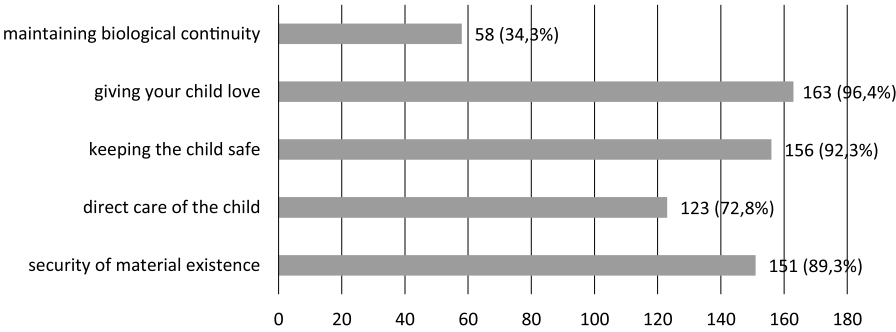


Figure 3. The father’s role in the family. Author’s own research.

Knowledge about parenting and child care is primarily drawn from family, but with the tremendous advances in technology, the internet is second, and doctors and midwives are third, as shown in Figure 4.

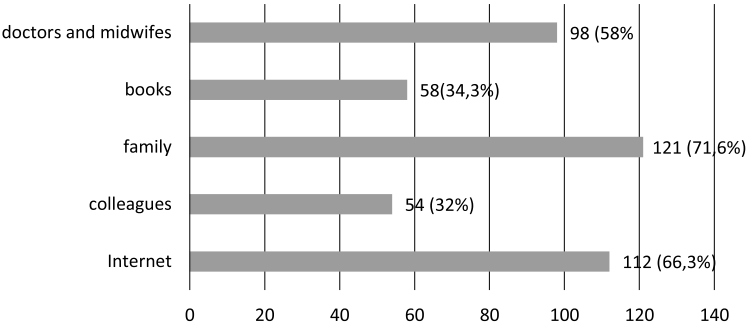


Figure 4. Parenting knowledge. Author’s own research.

None of the fathers stated that they were more responsible for taking care of their child, while 70.4% (n=119) were in favor of equal sharing of responsibilities between both parents. Fathers also believe that they greatly influence the formation of their child’s character and this is true for as many as 90.5% (n=153) of the respondents. All of the respondents have been vaccinated, it is optimistic that 96.4% (n=163) will transfer this practice to their child and 74% (n=125) of the fathers will give their children the recommended vaccinations. Fathers of 93.5% (n=158) of newborns supplement vitamin D3 to their children. It was interesting to compare the responses in the multiple choice closed questions, most of which were found to be statistically significant, these are shown in Table 2.

Table 2. Summary of statements and answers collected from multiple choice questions along with statistical significance. Author's own research.

Statment	Possible answer	Statistical significant
Child often cries	Father often tense and anxious	p = 0,02
Father has difficulty calming child		p = 0,0002
Mother bathes child more often		p = 0,0001
Father spends several hours a day with child	Feels more responsibility	p = 0,0001
	Happier in father role	p = 0,001
	More fulfilled as a parent	p = 0,0003
Parents disagree	Father is often tense and anxious	p = 0,02
	Spends fewer hours per day with child	p = 0,01
	Less happy in his role	P=0,006
Father has greater sense of responsibility	Easier to calm child	p = 0,02
Father reads, sings, walks, dresses child, watches over child at night	Happier in father role	p < 0,05
Father is late informed about pregnancy	Less influence of child on father's life flexibility	p = 0,01
	Gets up late often during the night	p = 0,002
	Spends fewer hours per day with child	p = 0,02
Father is responsible	More often reads, dresses child, goes for walks and bathes	p < 0,05
Father has high influence on child's personality formation	More often dresses, bathes child, sings, etc.	p < 0,05
Father often reads to child	Easier to calm child	p = 0,03
Father often sings to child		p = 0,007
Father often takes child to his arms		p = 0,008
Father often hugs child	More often smiles back	p = 0,01
Fathers often smiles at child	Easier to calm child	p < 0,0001
Father often feels overwhelmed	Less responsibility	p = 0,004
	Spends less time with child	p = 0,0007
	Claims to have less influnce on child personality	p = 0,006
	Less happy and fulfilled as parent	p < 0,05
	More often incompatible parents	p = 0,002
Partner had natural childbirth	Father less likely to consider child as major source of stress	p = 0,03
Father was present at birth		p = 0,01
Information about pregnancy brought feelings of anxiety, fear	More often tense and anxious arund child	p = 0,0001

Internet is a source of information about child care	Greater influence of child on father's life flexibility	p = 0,02
Age and education		
Father's age affects perception of his role	The older he is the more he believes he has a greater influence on shaping the child's personality	p = 0,03
	The older the less often he sings to the child	p = 0,03
	The younger he more wonders if he is doing enough	p = 0,04
	The younger the more often he is anxious and tense around the child	p = 0,03
Higher education has an influence on father's behaviour	Father bathes the child more often	p = 0,01
	Parents rarely disagree	p = 0,047

It follows that the more hours a day a father spends with his child, the more responsibility he feels and the happier and more fulfilled he is. When the father is better educated, parents are less likely to disagree and more likely to seek compromise. However, if they cannot come to an agreement, the father is more likely to be tense and anxious and spend less time with his child. The later the father finds out about the pregnancy, the harder it is for him to adjust to life with his child and the fewer hours he spends with his child each day. If he reads, sings or holds the baby, the easier it is to soothe him, and the more he hugs the baby, the more it smiles in his presence. When parents disagree about child care, the less excited he is about his new role. The younger the father, the less often he sings to the child, the more often he is anxious and tense, and wonders if he is doing enough for his offspring, but as he gets older he believes he has more influence in shaping the child's personality.

Discussion: Analyzing the literature on the father's care of the newborn we find numerous articles on the care of preterm infants in intensive care units, educational programs or depression, few of them show what he can do, what the father does and what emotions accompany him during this first period of the child's life (Prouhet et al., 2018). Our study shows that the level of knowledge about their newborn child seems to be quite high. Fathers are more and more often and willingly present during the entire period of pregnancy, providing support in the form of pre-natal care, not only in the form of consultation with a gynecologist, performing examinations, but also by attending a birthing school to support the mother immediately after delivery. Studies from four countries i.e.; Australia, Denmark, United Kingdom and United States show that majority of fathers take time off during the perinatal period irrespective of the leave policy in place (Huerta et al., 2014). Development of multi-component packages in infant care skills training for first-time fathers and training conditions result in an increase in the number of stimulation activities performed by fathers (Dachman et al., 1986). All educational programs are also effective. The results of a study of Bringing



Baby Home, a couple-centered program, in promoting father involvement and related satisfaction showed that fathers who participated in the program showed significantly greater involvement in parenting tasks, satisfaction with the division of parenting labor, and a sense of being valued by their partner (Shapiro et al., 2020). Another study reports that fathers wanted more guidance and support in preparing for fatherhood and changes in partner relationships (Baldwin et al., 2018). When fathers learned of the pregnancy, the most common accompanying emotion was joy and excitement; however, some fathers felt apprehension and anxiety, mainly concerning whether they could handle the new role. Family births are a modern trend, hence the high percentage of fathers present during them. Similar conclusions were reached by English researchers who found that more than 80% of fathers were happy or very happy in response to their partner's pregnancy, more than half were present at the pregnancy test, at one or more antenatal checks, and almost all were present at the ultrasound and at the birth (Redshaw & Henderson, 2013). A study by Greek researchers shows that almost all respondents 82.1% were proud to become fathers, however half felt anxious and nervous (Sapountzi-Krepia et al., 2010). Our observations show that fathers have detailed information about the perinatal period. The separation of the newborn and mother after cesarean section is still a routine procedure worldwide, but we find numerous papers in the literature in which the mother is replaced by the father immediately after a surgical delivery. Chilean researchers conducted a study that found that skin-to-skin contact showed some advantage over cribs and paternal arms in terms of establishment of stable physiological and wakefulness parameters (Ayala et al., 2021). A randomized control trial in a Taiwanese hospital highlights significantly higher father-child attachment as a result of the skin-to-skin contact technique (Chen et al., 2017). Our study shows that fathers either advocate equal sharing of responsibility in child care or indicate a dominant role for the mother. It should be noted, however, that the awareness of men themselves is changing, as they increasingly recognize the need to be involved in the child's life, which translates into spending several hours a day with them, gives satisfaction and makes their majority happy in their role. Our observations show that fathers are willing to devote more and more time during the day to their child. An interesting conclusion was reached by researchers who showed through the DREAM study that longer duration of paternity leave, current use of paternity leave, younger age, and lower education level were associated with more hours per week devoted to childcare (Schaber et al., 2021). The modern father is no longer assigned an authoritative style (Lewicka, 2020). His role is no longer merely instrumental but emotional and affectionate. The father is involved in parenting from the moment the child is born until the child becomes independent (Lewicka, 2020). The infant-caregiver relationship involves physical contact for feeding, carrying, and other nurturing activities, and this contact also promotes the formation of attachment, an emotional bond with the caregiver (Yoshida & Funato, 2021). The man is not only the main breadwinner of the family, but also undertakes the duties of raising and caring activities for the children (Wesoly, 2013). No one is surprised anymore to see a father pushing a stroller, holding a baby in his arms, or feeding milk from a bottle

(Świderska, 2011). In pairs who shared the calming responsibility, fathers felt more effective in parenting and mothers were less upset by the infant's crying, but the mother had a higher average number of calming techniques used (Dayton et al., 2015). Similar observations regarding the activities performed with the baby were made by researchers who studied the activities performed by the mother and father during the night. They showed that it is the mother who wakes up more often during the night, and the activities undertaken by her are mainly feeding, general care and changing the newborn, while the activities undertaken by the father are general care and feeding (Insana et al., 2014). Fathers' attitudes towards their children's health are also changing. It is emphasized that they are aware of how their child is fed, what vitamin supplementation it requires, and have a positive attitude towards vaccinations, the vast majority being in favor of mandatory vaccinations. The literature describes a movement toward a father-child community, characterized by an immediate and gradual change in the father as he takes on more and more responsibility, getting to know his child (Erlandsson et al., 2008). In no way can even the best mother replace the father, but neither can the father's role be to replace that of the mother. His new role emerges already during the pregnancy. If he becomes an active, involved participant in the pregnancy, labor, and birth, he is likely to become more involved in the care of the child and step into a nurturing role (Tudiver, 1981).

Conclusions: The millennial generation is part of a new partnership family model in which the father does not merely secure existence, but becomes a caregiver. His knowledge and skills in relation to the newborn child are increasing, which is associated with a higher sense of awareness of his role.

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