

'It feels like dads have been forgotten by the government'

Self-employed Stuart had no access to protected family time when his new baby arrived



Stuart Medcraft is a freelance graphic designer from Essex, who lives with his wife Holly, and two daughters: one aged 4 and the other 11 months.

He and Holly knew that money was going to be tight as they welcomed their second daughter in August 2023. They planned for Stuart's income to cover the mortgage and bills, and Holly's maternity pay to cover any extras. The last 12 months have been up and down financially, and Stuart wishes there had been more financial support for both his wife and himself during their baby's first year of life.

Before Holly finished work after giving birth to our second baby, she was working two-and-a-half days per week. It meant when she had the baby, money was going to be very tight while she stayed home for a year – as she wasn't getting as much maternity pay as someone who had been working-full time.

We planned that my income would cover the mortgage and necessary bills, and that Holly's money would buy clothes and any extras, like extracurricular activities for our 4-year-old.

As a self-employed dad, I don't get any paternity or shared parental leave.

When our baby was born, I wasn't able to take any undistracted time off to be with my family. Although I had said to clients that we were having a baby, since I work from home, I would disappear to work when family and friends came to visit. I never was fully off work. I didn't feel I could fully commit to either work or family.

In December, four months after the baby was born, I had my worst month for finding work. We tried to be financially sensible, but it was really stressful with money being so up and down. Luckily, we were having another girl so we could reuse most of what we had purchased for our first baby. But I often worried about putting food on the table, buying all the nappies we needed, and making sure our oldest daughter had all she needed to start school.

Every month, I'd look at the income target I had planned to reach, anxious when it didn't look like I was going to hit it. I spent weeks throughout my baby's first year lying in bed thinking of how I could generate more income for my family to lessen the load on us financially. It wasn't just me worrying – so was Holly. At times, the stress of it has caused tension between us.

To have had some sort of paternity allowance would have hugely alleviated stress in our family, especially during the last three months, when my wife hasn't had any payments coming through. It would have been great if I could have taken some time off, paid, to absorb some of the costs these last three months.

Knowing that someone is looking out for you is a huge thing mentally. I would have been less anxious and more able to fully engage as a dad this year had I known my government was looking out for me. But it feels like dads have been forgotten by the government.

I'm hoping that the new government will work to financially support dads and mums so that they can live without fear of how to provide for their children.