Children are expensive! In the US today, estimates for yearly child-rearing expenses are $12,600–$14,700 for a child in a two-parent, married-couple, middle-income family (Lino, 2013). Housing, childcare/education, food, clothes, transportation, and healthcare are major expenditures.

Most fathers of minor children are employed, as paid work is heavily socialized for males in American culture and work is central to men’s identity and family roles. According to 2012 employment statistics, 30.8% of married couples with children under 18 years had husbands-only employed and 59.0% had both husband and wife employed (Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2013). Unemployment rates for men in families declined in 2012 compared to 2011 (Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2013); unemployment rates for men were higher during the recent economic downturn that many dubbed the “mancession” (Wall, 2009). The recent economic setback notwithstanding, the relatively high percentage of fathers who are regularly employed has inspired researchers to look beyond men’s employment status (i.e., employed or not) to examine characteristics and conditions of fathers’ work in relation to parenting and, to a lesser extent, to children’s well-being and development.

Unlike mothers, whose employment is the source of public and research concern, when fathers’ work is the focus of family research, emphasis has been on the impact of fathers’ unemployment on children. A classic study of families in the Great Depression (Elder, 1974) revealed extended paternal unemployment to be associated with lower educational attainment and less occupational mobility for the children. In addition to financial hardship for the family, paternal
unemployment also has been linked to a greater incidence of infant health problems, behavioral and emotional problems in children and adolescents, lower self-esteem among adolescents, and a greater risk of depression and drinking among adolescents.

When mothers are not in the labor force, the common reason is to care for home and family. For the more than one million married fathers with minor children who were out of the labor force in 2012 (Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2013) it was usually due to illness or disability rather than to care for home and family (see Figure 6.1 for men aged 25–54). In the United States, a policy change, the Family and Medical Leave Act of 1993, gave parents at companies with more than 50 employees the right to take leave from work after the birth or adoption of a baby. However, this leave is unpaid. When men take off time around the birth of a new baby, they usually use vacation or sick days, although more large corporations have begun providing fathers with paid parental leave. The trend line in Figure 6.1 shows a

![Graph showing reasons why men leave the labor force, 1997–2011](image)

**Figure 6.1** Reasons why men leave the labor force, 1997–2011  