More and more men are quitting jobs to stay at home

Lisa Power and Brendan Casey

THEY feel shunned by play groups and feel their own fathers’ disapproval, but they excel at housework.

A peek inside the world of stay-at-home dads has revealed huge generational change in attitudes to gender roles, child rearing and men’s perception of their masculinity.

Men are still stigmatised for reversing roles, but most cherish the time spent with their children.

Researcher Deborah Wilmore, of the University of Western Sydney, who interviewed 65 dads, said their most stinging critics were their own “breadwinner” fathers.

“Mothers were much more supportive of men being at home,” she said. “Fathers were generally little more standoffish about it and generally couldn’t understand why. It really is that generation difference and it is interesting that it is only that one generation. Usually these types of ideas would take two or three generations to start becoming dominant.”

The number of stay-at-home dads is steadily growing. The Families in Australia 2011 report found that in 84 per cent of couples with one full-time job, the father was the breadwinner. Only in 7 per cent was the woman the main breadwinner. But stay-at-home dads increased from 2.7 per cent of families in 1983 to 6.6 per cent in 2003.

That figure is expected to have significantly risen.

Ms Wilmore said stay-at-home dads tended to have strong relationships with their partners, accept caring for the home was part of the “job”, often considered retraining and hated being nagged about joining play groups and play dates. She said: “A lot of men say they feel isolated.”

“Play groups were generally not available to them or they inherited their wives’ play groups and never quite felt comfortable with those.

“Their wives would try to talk them into socialising because that was something they did when they were at home, but they tend not to mind being on their own.”

Kew dad Paul Kleynjans enjoys the opportunity to see his two-year-old son Nash grow up, but he agrees it can be hard for some dads to be sociable and not feel isolated at organised play groups. “(Being a carer) can be hard work. He certainly keeps me busy,” Mr Kleynjans, 44, said. “Some mums can be a bit scared when they see a dad there, but once they see you’re a regular, they can be friendly.”

He quit his construction job 18 months ago to look after his son, and sometimes misses the camaraderie on the worksite: “I wouldn’t change it, though. I love taking Nash to the park or going out for a drive. There’s always something to do with him.”
Paul Kleynjans is having the time of his life bringing up son Nash.

Picture: MIKE KEATING

Up you go: Paul Kleynjans is having the time of his life bringing up son Nash.

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