



Research Summary: Paternity Leave

What do we mean by ‘paternity leave’?

Paternity leave is a father-specific right to take time off work soon after the birth of a child. Other leave taken when children are young is usually called ‘parental leave’. Some fathers take Annual Leave instead of, or as well as, paternity/parental leave, particularly where that is not available or is low paid. For the purposes of this research summary, we are referring to any leave that fathers take around the birth and in the first year of their child’s life.

More than 80% of employed fathers in OECD countries take formal leave near the birth. However, since around 90% of fathers attend their babies’ births, it seems likely that informal leave is also taken (Huerta et al, 2013).

Fathers’ use of paternity and parental leave is largest when leave is paid at above 50% wage replacement and is longer than 14 days (O’Brien, 2009) and when part of the entitlement is a ‘daddy quota’ – that is, it cannot be transferred to the baby’s mother, and is lost to the family if not used by the father (Huerta et al, 2013; O’Brien and Moss, 2010).

Some countries, e.g. Germany, incentivise uptake of leave by fathers not just through a ‘daddy quota’ but through a bonus payment to the family.

Are fathers who take leave different from fathers who don’t?

This is an important question, since it may be that some of the positive outcomes reported from fathers’ leave-use (see below) may result from more advantaged fathers taking leave in the first place. This is likely to be partly, but not entirely, the case.

- In most countries, fathers who take leave tend to be from more advantaged backgrounds (that is, to be better educated, native-born and married, and to work full-time and have high incomes). But this is not the case in countries such as Denmark, where legal provision of paternity and parental leave for fathers has been in place for almost three decades (Huerta et al, 2013).

- However, in Sweden, where fathers' leave is also well established, uptake of leave is indeed higher by men with relatively healthy lifestyles and a 'stable social position' (Mansdotter et al, 2010).
- In the UK, partners of first time mothers were slightly more likely to have taken paternity leave and to have taken longer leave, irrespective of social class (Redshaw & Henderson, 2013).
- Better educated fathers are found to spend more time with their children (Flouri, 2005; Yeung et al, 2001) BUT are not necessarily more engaged in childcare. In fact, a number of studies have found less advantaged fathers undertaking more child- or infant-care (Redshaw & Henderson, 2013; Haas & Hwang, 2008; Warin et al, 1999).
- One factor that, in most cases, over-rides the impact of fathers' leave-taking on fathers' time spent with children later is mothers' employment: the more hours mothers work and the more they earn, the more involved fathers tend to be, whether or not they took much leave in the first year (Baxter and Smart, 2011; Lammi-Taskula, 2008; Yeung et al., 2001).

What affects fathers' use of leave?

- Men's use of parental leave is significantly affected by their partner's level of earnings (Lappegard, 2008) and by their own and their partner's attitudes to gender-equality (Lammi-Taskula, 2007; Haas et al, 2002).
- Among employed men, fathers' use of parental leave is also strongly influenced by organizational culture, including their company's commitment to caring values, level of 'father friendliness' and support for equal opportunities for women; and also the fathers' perceptions of support from top managers, and of work group norms that reward task performance vs. long hours at work (Haas et al, 2002).
- Men's use of parental leave is strongly affected by a country's parental leave policies (Moss, 2013).
- It is interesting to note that when fathers say they 'cannot afford' to take leave, this is often based on assumptions, rather than formal calculations (Lammi-Taskula, 2007).
- It has never been easy to evaluate the impact of public information campaigns on gender equality, including fathers' uptake of leave. Between 1976 and 2006 paternity leave campaigns in Sweden addressed men's participation in 'care work' but positioned them as secondary rather than primary parents. More recently, the campaigns have stressed parents' equal responsibility for leave — "Half each" (Klinth, 2008).

Does longer leave-taking impact on fathers' childcare involvement later?

- Swedish fathers who took 120 or more days of leave during the 1990s reported that taking this leave enabled them to develop closer emotional relationships with their children and this made them feel responsible for childcare after the leave period was over (Chronholm, 2004)
- In Norway, two early in-depth studies of 'leave sharing couples' found that when fathers take leave 'there is a redefinition and redistribution' of tasks at home (Brandth and Kvande, 1998) and 'a development of competence' in childcare (Brandth and Kvande, 2005).
- More recently, taking account of fathers' education and income, studies in the US (Nepomnyaschy and Waldfogel, 2007) and the UK (Tanaka and Waldfogel, 2007) found a significant connection between fathers' taking leave around the birth and involvement in the care of their babies and young children later.
- For example, UK fathers who take formal leave are 25% more likely to change nappies and 19% more likely to feed their 8-12 month old babies and to get up to them at night (Tanaka and Waldfogel, 2007). This was unrelated to their commitment to parenting before the child's birth and was irrespective of the time mothers or other family members spent with the children (Huerta et al, 2013).
- Analysis of Swedish fathers working in large private companies showed that fathers who took longer leave were more involved in the care of their children right up to age 12. And any leave-taking was connected with fathers being more likely to look after children on their own while the mothers worked (Haas & Hwang, 2008).
- In Australia, Hosking et al. (2010) found an association between fathers' leave-taking and being more likely to look after children on their own at weekends (Hoskings et al, 2010); and Huerta et al (2013) reported that Australian fathers who had taken 10 or more days off work around childbirth were more likely to be involved in childcare-related activities when children were 2 to 3 years old.
- In Norway, taking longer leave has been linked with a remarkably tiny 'wage penalty' for fathers – just -2.1% when their child was five years old (the last measurement-point). This probably reflects the fact that the fathers continued to shift time and effort from earning to home activities (Rege and Solli, 2010).
- High take up of parental leave by Swedish fathers is linked to working shorter hours when returning to work (Duvander & Jans, 2009).

Impact on mothers and gender-equality

- In the UK, a father's taking paternity leave is strongly associated with mothers' well-being three months after the birth (Redshaw & Henderson, 2013).

- In Norway, mothers' absence due to sickness is reduced by about 5–10% from an average level of 20% in families where fathers take longer leave (Bratberg and Naz, 2009).
- In France, when paternity leave results in more infant care by fathers, new mothers are less likely to be depressed (Séjourné et al, 2012).
- Father-specific leave entitlements are associated with both mothers and fathers taking longer leave when their children are very young (Patnaik, 2013; Cools et al, 2011; Han et al, 2009). This might suggest that 'daddy quotas' will not support gender equality.
- However, in Quebec the introduction of the 'daddy quota' was associated with mothers being more likely to return to the same employer (Patnaik, 2013) and, some years later, to be working longer hours (Patnaik, ???).
- In Sweden it has been estimated that each additional month of parental leave taken by the father increases the mother's earnings by 6.7% (Johansson, 2010).

Impact on couples

- In Norway, following the introduction of the four-week 'daddy quota' significant numbers of fathers took longer leave. After this, an 11% lower level of conflict over household division of labour was found, and couples were 50% more likely to share clothes-washing equally (Kotsadam and Finseraas, 2011).
- Similarly, in Quebec, some years after the introduction of their 'daddy quota', fathers were found to be more engaged in routine household tasks (Patnaik, 2013). A robust evidence base finds that greater participation in household chores is connected with couple relationship stability.
- Swedish couples are 30% less likely to separate if the father took more than two weeks leave to care for their first child (Olah, 2001).
- There is less violence in families where fathers have taken parental leave (Holter et al, 2008)

Impact on fathers

- Swedish fathers who took paternity leave in the late 1970s have had an 18% lower risk of alcohol-related care and/or death than other fathers and a 16% overall reduced risk of early death (Mansdotter et al, 2008; Mansdotter et al, 2007).
- Swedish fathers who take longer leave are more satisfied with time spent with their children (Haas & Hwang, 2008).

- Israeli and US fathers who take longer leave remain more focused on their infant afterwards and more supportive to their partner, and place higher value on family life. Employer responses to their leave-taking are also more positive (Feldman et al, 2004).

Impact on children

- Infants whose fathers take paternity leave during the first year are significantly more likely to be breastfed at two, four and six months of age (Flacking et al, 2010).

- In the UK, fathers' not using paternity leave or not sharing childcare responsibilities are associated with increased likelihood of their three year old having developmental problems (Dex & Ward, 2007)

- In Sweden an increase in fathers' share of parental leave over time has been paralleled by a downward trend in child injury rates, age 0-4 years (Laflamme et al, 2012).

- Some have suggested that leave-taking by fathers would be associated with greater incidence of child injury. This is not born out in the research: in Sweden, child injury (age 0-2 years) was lower during paternity as compared with maternity leave (Laflamme et al, 2012).

- If one parent is better-educated than the other, some children may benefit from the better-educated parent undertaking more care: e.g. in Norway, girls (but not boys) have been found to do better at school when a father who was better educated than their mother took longer-than-average leave (Cools et al, 2011.) In Sweden, longer leave-taking by mothers only impacted positively on children's scholastic performance if the mother was highly educated (Liu and Sans, 2010).

- Australian children whose fathers take long leave after their birth perform better in cognitive development tests and are more likely to be prepared for school at ages four and five (Huerta et al, 2013)

- In Norway, adolescent girls whose fathers were in the first cohort to benefit from 'daddy quota' leave are now found to be doing less housework (Kotsadam and Finseraas, 2013).

- High take up of parental leave by Swedish fathers is linked to more contact with children after separation (Duvander and Jans, 2009).

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