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WHAT KIND OF MEN TAKE PARENTAL LEAVE?

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INTRODUCTION

The main purpose of a post-childbirth leave of absence from employment (maternity, paternity and parental leave) is to provide opportunity to employed parents to take care of their children in the first months (and years), with job security and (possibly) wage compensation or a lump sum that lowers the opportunity costs of their temporary absence from work. Such leave is one of the crucial instruments for successful reconciliation of work and family life (Stropnik and Sambt, 2007).

Thirty-five years have passed since men were granted the right to take part of the parental leave for the first time. Sweden was a pioneer in 1974, with many countries following its example (Slovenia in the same year already). Before 1974, any form of employment leave to look after infants, or indeed older children, had only been awarded to mothers (O'Brien, Brandth and Kvande, 2007). According to Heyman et al (2007: 25-26), fathers have a paid entitlement to paternity leave (lasting from two days to three months) in 27 countries across the world, and at least 42 countries offer parental leave to mothers and fathers (32 of them offer paid leave). Since only small proportions of men use(d) to take (several days of more of) parental leave (in the form of the family entitlement), paternity leave or father's quotas within parental leave (meaning that the part of the parental leave was foregone if not taken by the other parent, usually the father) were introduced in some countries. The father's month⁴ within parental leave was introduced in Sweden in 1989, and the four-week⁵ father's quota in Norway in 1993. In most cases these proved to be success stories, positively influencing the fathers' take-up of the leave. The average number of days taken by men in Iceland has more than doubled since 2001 (up from an average of 39 in 2001 to 99 in 2006) with the extension of father-only leave. The proportion of men taking some leave Norway has increased from four per cent to 89 per cent since the introduction of the one-month father's quota. The new parental leave scheme, introduced in Québec in 2006, has had an impact on fathers' participation; in 2007, 56 per cent of fathers in Québec took a period of leave compared with

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³ We regret that due to late delivery of the Slovenian data we were not able to finalise our paper by the deadline.

⁴ It is 60 days now (Moss, 2009)

⁵ It is six weeks now (Moss, 2009).

22 per cent in 2006. The proportion of leave days taken by men in Sweden doubled between 1997 and 2004, with the introduction and then the extension of a father's quota, though the doubling to two months had a less dramatic effect than the initial introduction of a quota (Moss, 2009: 92).

Higher foregone earnings have been frequently named as the main reason why fathers (usually earning higher income than their female partners) rarely take parental leave (Von Lucius, 2005). However, the fact that fathers have not been (very) eager to make use of their entitlement to parental leave or to take many days of it even in the countries where their earnings have been highly compensated (or even fully compensated, like in Slovenia) suggests the prevailing influence of non-monetary factors on their decision-making.

One of the important European Union aims is to guarantee equal opportunities and enable/ease work-life balance. In the last three decades we have witnessed a considerable increase in female employment in many countries in the region, which was not accompanied by any considerable change in male time-use patterns. The reconciliation of professional and family obligations seems to be a burning issue in Europe and other developed parts of the world (Stropnik, 2009). Although men (fathers) are ever more ready to take over some of the caring task, (working) women are still performing the bulk of that work. The difficulties in balancing professional work and motherhood increase the risk of women's occupational and social exclusion. Employers perceive woman as less effective than male employees because the periods of professional inactivity (due to maternity and parental leaves that are quite long in Europe,⁶ but also due to care of sick children) tend to lower their professional knowledge and skills.

The paper uses new data to explain the fathers' prevailing behaviour pattern, i.e., to identify the fathers' characteristics that determine their take-up of parental or paternity leave. Our aim is to contribute to the understanding of the reasons for the fathers' low take-up of the parental leave in particular.

PRIOR RESEARCH

There are three basic areas of research where the issue of fathers' take-up of paternity/parental leave is present.

- Research focused on factors that influence the fathers' decision-making regarding the take-up of leave.
- Research on the impact of organizational culture (workplace situation) on men's use of parental leave. The authors speak of the change in the social construction of fatherhood (Højgaard, 1997) that includes the relationship between working life and fatherhood;

⁶ See Moss (2009) for an overview.

impact of the policies on the equality between the sexes; and impact of the attitudes of management and male co-workers).

- Research on the efficacy of measures introduced to stimulate paternal involvement in the care and (emotional, cognitive and social) well-being of children. As a rule, the findings suggest that parental/paternity leave taking has the potential to boost fathers' emotional investment in infant care.

Our own research belongs to the first area. Prior research evidence is biased regarding both types of leave (father's entitlement implicit in family entitlement to parental leave, father's quota within parental leave, or paternity leave) and countries. The largest number of studies used the Swedish data (Haas and Hwang, 2008; Bygren and Duvander, 2006; Sundstrom and Duvander, 2002; Haas, Allard and Hwang, 2002; Albrecht, Edin, Sundstrom and Vroman, 1999). Brandth and Kvande (2002) analysed the case of Norway. The recent research by Geisler and Kreyenfeld (2009) was focused on Germany. O'Brien and Shemilt (2003) studied the situation in the United Kingdom. There are also studies using the USA data (Nepomnyaschy and Waldfogel, 2007; Seward et al., 2006) and the Australian data (Whitehouse, Diamond and Baird, 2007).

DATA AND METHOD

Our empirical analysis is based on two very different sources: the IPPAS database containing data for seven European countries was used for a multivariate analysis while the Slovenian database was used for a country case study. An attempt was also made to use the 2005 Labour Force Survey module on reconciliation between work and family life, but it failed due to a limited comparability of two key variables ("parental leave taken" and "main reason for not having taken parental leave").

1) The IPPAS database

Logistic regression analyses were performed using the International Population Policy Acceptance Study (IPPAS) database.⁷ National surveys were conducted between 2001 and 2003. The relevant information was available for Austria (2001), the Czech Republic (2001), Finland (2002), Germany (2003), Italy (2002), the Netherlands (2002) and Poland (2001). In these countries' databases there were fathers who took parental leave.

We investigated (1) the determinants of the men's/fathers' take-up of parental leave and (2) the characteristics of women/mothers having partners who took parental leave. Considering the fact that the father's right to take parental leave was first introduced in 1974, we included

⁷ This database is an outcome of the project "DIALOG - Population Policy Acceptance Study (PPAS): The Viewpoint of Citizens and Policy Actors Regarding the Management of Population Related Change" funded by the European Commission under the 5th Framework Programme (Contract No. HPSE-CT-2002-00153).

into our analysis only those fathers whose youngest child was born in 1988 or later. In that way we hopefully came close to taking into account only those fathers who actually had the possibility to take parental (or paternity) leave.

Our logistic regression model uses demographic variables, economic variables, and attitudes towards children/parenthood and towards the gender division of roles. Standard demographic variables include age (at the time of birth of youngest child), educational attainment and type of residence. Six age groups are observed (20-24, 25-29, 30-34, 34-39, 40-44, 45 and over) and three educational levels (primary or lower secondary, higher secondary, and post secondary). We distinguish between four types of places of residence (rural area or small village, small town, middle sized town, large town). Economic characteristics of the respondents are brought into the model through the variable "employment status" (full-time, part-time, no job). Attitudes towards children and parenthood are captured by the (non)agreement with the following two statements: (a) "you can not be really happy without having children", and (b) "a pre-school child is likely to suffer if mother works". The attitudes towards the gender division of roles are evident from (non)agreement with the following statements: (a) "it is not good if the man stays at home and cares for children and the woman goes out to work", and (b) "family life often suffers because men concentrate too much on their work". There is also a country dummy in the model which is expected to reflect the country-specific institutional arrangements, i.e. the characteristics of the father's entitlement to parental leave and of the paternity leave entitlement (duration, earnings compensation/benefit and modes of use).

The availability of data was a great constraint for improving our models. Ideally, data would have included activity and employment status of the partner, family income, and the year of taking the parental leave. Due to data constraint it was necessary to assume that the parental/paternity leave was taken for the youngest child. Also, two variables ("type of place of residence" and "the number of children") were not available for Italy and Austria. A trade-off between the number of variables and the number of countries was inevitable. Therefore we applied four logistic regression models:

- Model 1 includes 7 countries and only those demographic and economic variables that are available for all countries (the variable "type of place of residence" is excluded);
- Model 2 includes only 4 countries and all demographic and economic variables;
- Model 3 includes 6 countries, the demographic and economic variables that are available for all countries, and one attitudinal variable ("the only place you can feel completely happy and at ease is at home with your children");
- Model 4 includes only 4 countries, the demographic and economic variables that are available for all countries, and four attitudinal variables.

Each model was applied separately for fathers and mothers, which additionally limited the number of cases included. Consequently, the models for men/fathers on parental leave include from 1,674 cases in Model 4, to 2,846 cases in Model 1. Similarly, the model for mothers whose male partners took parental leave includes from 2,136 cases in Model 4 to 3,856 cases in Model 1.

2) The Slovenian database

The Slovenian database of the parental- and paternity leave beneficiaries was used to illustrate and analyse the developments in this country in the periods before and after the implementation of the paternity leave. This database includes all male beneficiaries from December 2005 to April 2009. It contains information about the number of days of parental and paternity leaves taken by the fathers, modes of use of these leaves (as a continuous leave or by days), the fathers' and the mothers' age, the number of children, fathers' employment characteristics, family income, and some other details. We distinguish between three different types of paternity/parental leave taken by fathers: (1) up to 15 days of paternity leave with 100% earnings compensation, (2) up to 75 days of paternity leave without earnings compensation but with social security contributions (based on the minimum and not actual wage) paid, and (3) up to 260 days of parental leave with 100% earnings compensation. It should be noted that the data on family income and the number of children was provided from the child allowance beneficiaries database; this information is thus only available for families receiving the child allowance.⁸

INSTITUTIONAL CONTEXT

1) Parental leave arrangements in seven European countries

The institutional arrangements in seven European countries under consideration relate to the survey year (see Table 1). Only paid leave is taken into account since unpaid leave is not affordable for most families. Special attention is paid to the paternity leave. It was implemented in Finland in 1976 and in the Netherlands in 2001. In the Czech Republic, Germany and Austria there was no paternity leave at the time of the national surveys.

⁸ In 2009, the child allowance is received by about 75% of all children below the age of one year, about 92% of children aged one year, etc. It obviously takes some time for parents to apply for child allowance, which is a drawback for our database.

Table 1: Parental leave at the time of the national surveys (2000-2003)

Country	Parental leave at the time of the survey			Of that, paternity leave
	Duration ¹⁾	Flexibility	Possibility of part-time leave (after maternity leave)	Duration and payment
The Czech Republic	Up to age 3			-
Germany	Up to age 2 ²⁾	3 rd year till age 8, upon approval by employer	Yes	-
Italy	Up to age 1.2	Till age 8		1 month, if the father takes 3-6 months of parental leave; 30% of earnings
The Netherlands ³⁾	Up to age 0.2			2 working days within the 4 weeks after the day of the birth; 100% of earnings
Austria	Up to age 2		Up to age 4	-
Poland	Up to age 2.5			-
Finland	Up to age 3		Up to school age ⁴⁾	18 weekdays during the maternity or mother's parental allowance period; 70%, 40% or 25% of daily earnings, depending on annual earnings.

Notes:

1) All paid leave (maternity leave after birth of the child, paternity leave and parental leave) with job security, if taken continuously. Special arrangements for certain groups are not taken into consideration. **Duration is expressed in terms of the child's age.**

2) In five out of sixteen federal countries paid until age 2.5-3.

3) Only maternity leave is paid in the Netherlands. Parental leave is paid in the public sector and very rarely in the private sector.

4) Till the end of the year in which the child starts attending school.

Sources: DIALOG project, WP4 country reports (internal material); European Commission (2001).

2) The Slovenian institutional context

For more than fifty years, Slovenia has been a country with a high female employment rate. This is not only due to the professional aspirations of Slovenian women, but has also to do with the need arising from the relation between income and the cost of living (Stropnik and Šircelj, 2008: 1034). In the last quarter of 2008, the employment rate was 62.7% for men and 51.4% for women (Svetin and Rutar, 2009). Only 11.4% of employed women worked part-time. Typically, after parental leave, women continue to work full-time. In 2005, economic activity rate for women with a child aged 0-3 years was 73% (Eurydice, 2009: Figure 2.6).

Since almost the entire generations of females at relevant age are today included in higher secondary education, and half the relevant generations continue schooling at the post-secondary level, it may be expected that women in Slovenia will remain highly attached to the labour market (Stropnik and Šircelj, 2008: 1036). Family policy measures provide the necessary preconditions for reconciling work with family obligations.

However, the employers (rightly) presume that women will take the whole of the leave, which undermines women's labour market opportunities and professional careers. Paternity leave and fathers having the same entitlement to parental leave as mothers do not significantly influence mothers to return to work earlier because the traditional gender division of roles in a family persists (Stropnik, 2005). Sixty-three per cent of fathers took up to 15 days of fully compensated⁹ paternity leave in 2003 (when it was introduced), and some two-thirds in 2005. About three-quarters of fathers took up to 15 days paternity leave in 2006-2008, but only 15% of leave takers took more than 15 days in 2008. Research suggests that most fathers (91% in 2004) do not take more than 15 days of paternity leave because their earnings are not fully compensated during the rest of it. There were also obstacles on the employers' side (Rener, Švab, Žakelj and Humer, 2005; Stropnik, 2005).

The share of fathers who took some of the parental leave (the possibility for fathers to take that leave was enacted in 1974 and implemented in 1975) stood at about 1% and has increased to 2% in the 2000s. In 2008, 5.6% of fathers took a part of parental leave, as compared to only 0.6% in 1999. This shift may be attributed to higher awareness of fathers' entitlements following the introduction of the paternity leave. It has been argued that - considering the full wage compensation during the leave - the reasons for a participation of fathers as low as this may be found in the traditional division of tasks within the family, attitudes in the society (not the declared ones but rather those that rule people's behaviour), the absence of a positive image attributed to the father who assumes more family responsibilities, and employers' expectations and demands as concerns their male employees (Rener, Švab, Žakelj and Humer, 2005; Stropnik, 2005; Stropnik and Šircelj, 2008: 1043). A higher level of equality in parenting (starting with father's taking all of the available paternity leave and half of the childcare leave) would contribute to equal opportunities in the labour market.

⁹ The payment is equal to 100 per cent of average earnings based on earnings on which the social security contributions were paid during the twelve months prior to the leave. There is a ceiling of 2.5 times the average wage in Slovenia for earnings compensation during the paternity and the parental leave. Consequently, one can hardly (and rarely) speak of considerable foregone earnings during the leave. The minimum payment amounts to 55 per cent of the minimum wage (approximately €325 a month).

RESULTS

1) Logistic regression

It is important to note that all models resulted in the same signs for all variables as compared to the reference groups.

The fathers who took parental leave

The likelihood for the fathers to take parental (and/or paternity) leave is significantly:

- lower for those aged 20-24 years (also 25-29 years) and 45 years and over at the time of birth of their youngest child than for those aged 30-34 years;¹⁰
- higher for fathers with part-time jobs or those with no job, as compared with fathers with full-time jobs;¹¹
- lower in other observed countries than in Finland;
- lower for fathers living in middle sized towns than in large towns;
- higher for those who disagree with the statement that “a pre-school child is likely to suffer if mother works” than for those who agree;
- higher for those who disagree with the statement that “it is not good if the man stays at home and cares for children and the woman goes out to work” than for those who agree.¹²

The educational level is generally not significant (lower likelihood for fathers with only primary or lower secondary education than for those with higher education) (Model 1).¹³ The number of children is not at all significant.¹⁴

The mothers whose male partners took parental leave

The likelihood that the father will take parental (and/or paternity) leave is significantly:

- lower if the mother is 20-29 years old than if she is aged 30-34 years;¹⁵

¹⁰ There was an association with age, albeit not a linear one: the results indicated that fathers were more likely to take leave with increasing age, but only up to a point, after which the effect levelled off (Whitehouse, Diamond and Baird, 2007).

¹¹ Fathers are less involved as their own hours increase (Bonney et al., 1999; Tanaka and Waldfogel, 2007). Fathers working fewer than 35 hours per week were considerably less likely to take leave than the reference group working 35-39 hours, and those working 50 hours or more per week were also less likely than the reference group to take any leave (Whitehouse, Diamond and Baird, 2007).

¹² The parents' support for the parental leave and the equalitarian gender beliefs were associated with fathers taking leave (Seward et al, 2006).

¹³ Fathers' education had no significant impact on the propensity to take leave (Whitehouse, Diamond and Baird, 2007).

¹⁴ Fathers are more likely to take leave (and take longer leave) if the child is a first-born (Nepomnyaschy and Waldfogel, 2007; Whitehouse, Diamond and Baird, 2007; Sundstrom and Duvander, 2002; Albrecht, Edin, Sundstrom and Vroman, 1999).

- lower if the mother is living in a small town than in a large town;
- generally higher if the woman has more than one child (particularly in Model 2);
- lower in other observed countries than in Finland;
- higher for those who disagree with the statement that “it is not good if the man stays at home and cares for children and the woman goes out to work” than for those who agree;
- higher if the mother has a post-secondary education than a higher secondary education (Models 1 and 3).¹⁶

The employment status of the mother is generally not significant.¹⁷

2) Take-up of leave by the fathers in Slovenia

The proportion of the entitled fathers who actually took paternity and parental leave was increasing in the period from 2006 to 2008. In 2008, the fully compensated paternity leave lasting 15 days was taken by about 77% of the entitled fathers (on average, they took 14.5 days per child). More days (with only social security contributions based on the minimum wage paid from the state budget) were taken by some 10% of the entitled fathers. The average duration of that part of paternity leave (for those who took it) is decreasing with the number of children in the family (from about 65 days for fathers with only one child to 58 days for fathers with 5-7 children).

The proportion of fathers who took the fully compensated paternity leave lasting 15 days is not very much influenced by the organisational form of the company they work with. It is between about 83% of entitled fathers in joint stock companies and about 94% of fathers in companies with general partnership and individual private enterprises. The share of fathers who took further 20 days of paternity leave is relatively the highest in joint stock companies. However, the companies do not differ according the share of entitled fathers who took more than 50 days of non-compensated paternity leave.

The parental leave was taken by slightly more than 4% of entitled fathers in 2008. Generally, the number of days taken by fathers increases with the number of children in the family: from about 171 days for fathers with only one child, to 191 days for those with three children and about 257 days for fathers with 5 children.

The proportion of fathers who took more than 200 days of parental leaves is more than proportional in individual private enterprises and less than proportional in joint stock companies (compared to the proportion of all fathers who took parental leave). The number of

¹⁵ There is no evidence that mother’s age had impact on father’s propensity to take leave (Whitehouse, Diamond and Baird, 2007). Fathers are more likely to be on parental leave if they have an older partner (Geisler and Kreyenfeld, 2009).

¹⁶ Fathers are more likely to take leave if they have a highly educated partner (Geisler and Kreyenfeld, 2009; Moss, 2009: 93). There is no evidence that mother’s education had impact on father’s propensity to take leave (Whitehouse, Diamond and Baird, 2007).

¹⁷ Mother’s employment status had no effect on father’s use of leave (Whitehouse, Diamond and Baird, 2007).

days taken is the highest in companies with general partnership (225 days compared to the maximum of 260 days) and the lowest in joint stock companies (143 days). The great majority of fathers take full-time leave.

Type of contract (permanent or temporary) is not important for take-up of individual kind of leave.

The higher the father's age, the more days of unpaid paternity leave and more days of parental leave are taken. Fathers up to 25 years of age are an exception.

Income has no significant impact on the take-up of paid paternity leave. It is generally characteristic for the 1st to the 4th income quintile that, with an increase in income, the fathers take less days of unpaid paternity leave and of parental leave.¹⁸

More days of unpaid paternity leave are taken in the less developed regions of Slovenia.

CONCLUSIONS

Our conclusions are similar to those by other researchers who investigated the fathers' take-up of paternity and parental leave: that such research is still at an early stage, that the evidence base is still surprisingly low, and that we still know very little about fathers' experiences of employment-family reconciliation. Particular national contexts may to a great extent explain different (even opposite) results regarding factors that hinder or sustain the fathers' take-up of leave.

The identification of the kind of men who tend to take parental (and paternity) leave will help the policy makers and the public administration in shaping and focusing future measures intended to increase the fathers' take-up of the leave, and consequently promote equal opportunities of both parents on the labour market. However, an important question still remains to be answered: how many mothers were/are indeed willing to share (some of) the leave that is family entitlement with the children's fathers? This is particularly rarely probable in the countries where the whole of the mother's and family entitlement is less than half a year or so.

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¹⁸ Fathers' hourly wage was significantly and positively associated with leave-taking (Whitehouse, Diamond and Baird, 2007). Fathers took longer parental leave if they had greater income (Sundstrom and Duvander, 2002; Albrecht, Edin, Sundstrom and Vroman, 1999).

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