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Daddy Leave: Does It Change the Gender Division of Domestic Work?

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Daddy leave: does it change the gender division of domestic work?

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How to best provide incentives for a more gender-equal division of domestic work has entered policy debates in many Western countries. Growing evidence suggests that a gender-traditional division of household labor may result in lower fertility rates and greater risk of relationship breakdown and correlates with gender employment and wage gaps. Partly in response, many European countries have implemented some individual parental leave entitlements for fathers, which are not transferrable to mothers. Such non-transferable entitlements for fathers have been consistently shown to increase take-up of (short) leaves by fathers.

Whether leave take-up indeed increases fathers' involvement in child care and housework also in the long-term is a more contested question. This DIW Roundup describes potential mechanisms that may underlie such a change and provides an overview of the existing evidence. Overall, previous studies from different countries point to some longer-term effects of fathers taking more than a couple of weeks of leave on a more equal gender division of domestic work.

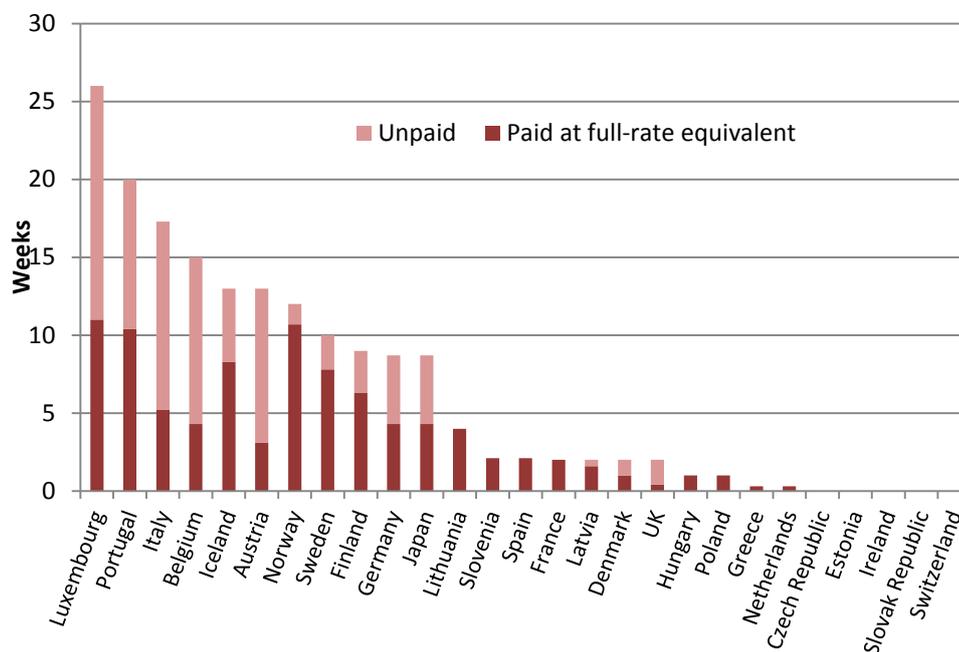
In recent years, the gender division of domestic work has received increasing attention from researchers and policy-makers, as a gender-traditional division of housework or child care in couples correlates with larger gender employment gaps after childbirth (e.g., [Sanchez and Thomson 1997](#), [Schober 2013a](#)), greater gender wage gaps (e.g., [Bryan and Sevilla-Sanz](#)) and can be associated with reduced likelihood of a second birth (e.g., [Schober 2013b](#), [Olah 2003](#)) and greater risk of relationship breakdown (e.g., [Schober 2012](#), [2013b](#)). As the transition to parenthood has been found to be the starting point of increasing gender inequality in the division of paid and unpaid work (e.g., [Grunow et al. 2012](#), [Schober 2013a](#)), most policy attention has focused on family policies, in particular leave policies, targeting the early years of parenthood.

By 2013, the majority of European countries had implemented some individual child-related leave entitlements for both partners in a couple, which are not transferrable to the other partner. These may take the form of specific leave entitlements only for the mother or the father (hereafter called 'paternity leave') or a designated proportion of the parental leave may be reserved for each partner (hereafter called 'father leave quota'). In practice, mothers have tended to take leave for longer periods than their designated individual entitlements, whereas fathers' leave take-up rates used to be very low until non-transferable leave entitlements for each partner or specifically for fathers were introduced. In particular in combination with relatively generous compensation rates, rights to paternity leave and father leave quotas have been found to significantly increase paternal uptake of leave (e.g., [Wrohlich et al. 2012](#), [O'Brien 2009](#), [Patnaik 2014](#)). However, most fathers who take

some parental leave do so only for the designated period of the leave quota, (e.g., [Wrohlich et al. 2012](#), [O'Brien 2009](#), [Patnaik 2014](#), [Trappe 2013](#)).

Figure 1 shows the number of weeks of paternity leaves or father leave quotas and the extent of which they are paid or unpaid. To facilitate cross-national comparability, the entitlement to paid leave is presented as the full-rate equivalent of the proportion of the duration of paid leave if it were paid at 100 percent of last earnings.

Figure 1: Weeks of child-related leave entitlement for fathers which cannot be transferred, either paid at full-rate equivalent or unpaid, across Europe in 2013



Note: Full-rate equivalent is calculated as the total duration of leave in weeks times the payment as percentage of average wage earnings received by the father

Source: adapted from [OECD Family database](#),

http://www.oecd.org/els/soc/PF2_1_Parental_leave_systems_1May2014.pdf, retrieved on 06/11/2014

Underlying mechanisms

At least three potential explanations can be identified how leave take-up may increase fathers' child care involvement and lead to a more equal division of domestic work in the medium- or longer-term after the end of both parents' leave entitlements: 1) Improved bonds with children and domestic skills, 2) Reduced marketable skills and lower bargaining power, 3) Changing gender roles and parenting identities.

According to the neo-classical economic theory (Becker 1981), a parent on leave is assumed to acquire better housework and child care skills, including improved child-specific knowledge and closer bonds with children. The relative improvement of domestic skills may lead to continuing greater involvement in domestic work of the respective parent also subsequently after the leave ended. A recent qualitative study of paternal leave taking suggested that fathers had acquired new domestic

skills and greater respect for the care work previously done by mothers already after relatively short leave durations of about one month ([Rehel 2014](#)).

At the same time, neo-classical economic theory (Becker 1981) predicts that employment interruptions lead to a depreciation of labor market-relevant knowledge of the respective partner. This may be assumed to lower the future earnings potential of the leave-taking partner, for instance by slowing down career progression. From a resource-bargaining perspective ([Lundberg and Pollak 1996](#)), (longer) leave take-up of fathers should therefore reduce their bargaining power to negotiate for lower contributions to housework for themselves.

Following identity and role occupancy perspectives ([Stryker and Burke 2000](#), [Knoester and Eggebeen 2006](#)), the experience of leave-taking may alter fathers' self-concept towards greater salience of the caregiving parent as opposed to identification with other roles, such as breadwinning. New parents have been found to consciously construct their identities ([Deutsch et al. 1988](#)). Attitudinal changes have been found to vary by the work and care arrangements which parents practice ([Schober and Scott 2012](#), [Himmelweit and Sigala 2004](#)). Through altered preferences for work and care, the take-up and length of fathers' leaves may impact the division of housework and child care even beyond labor market return.

Existing evidence: Does leave take-up increase domestic involvement of fathers?

A growing cross-national comparative literature suggests that maternal and paternal domestic work contributions vary across contexts and one important variation relates to leave entitlements for mothers and fathers (e.g. [Hook 2006](#), [Sullivan et al. 2009](#), [Rehel 2014](#)). Studies from Germany also document that while fathers take parental leave, they spend a substantial share of their time on child care (e.g., [Wrohlich et al. 2012](#), [Lauber et al. 2014](#), [Schober 2014](#)).

Results of previous studies, however, are mixed as to whether fathers who took some leave spent more time with their children in the medium and long term after returning to the labor market. Studies from Sweden, Canada, and the US ([Haas and Hwang 2008](#), [Nepomnyaschy and Waldfogel 2007](#), [Rehel 2014](#)) found that fathers who took longer leave participated more in child care. Having taken any leave was also positively related to later paternal child care involvement in the US and the UK ([Tanaka and Waldfogel 2007](#), [Pleck 1993](#)), whereas associations with weekday and sole child care proved weak in Australia ([Hosking et al. 2010](#)) and not significant in Germany ([Wrohlich et al. 2012](#)).

These studies were based on child care information collected at one point after the father had taken leave with retrospective questions on leave take-up. This is problematic because fathers who take leave have been found to vary systematically from those who do not. In Germany, Sweden, and Norway, fathers were found to be more likely to take some leave when they had lower or about equal earnings as their partners (e.g., [Reich 2011](#), [Trappe 2013](#), [Lappegard 2008](#), [Naz 2010](#)). Job characteristics, such as employment in the public sector or in a large company, in female-dominated professions, or on a permanent employment contract before childbirth were also predictive of (longer) paternal leave take-up (e.g., [Geisler and Kreyenfeld 2011](#), [Bygren and Duvander 2006](#), [Naz 2010](#)). Qualitative studies have suggested that couples where fathers take leave hold stronger ideals of sharing child care in a gender-egalitarian way (e.g., [Vaskovics and Rost 1999](#)). As some of these characteristics are difficult to observe and measure, cross-sectional studies may overestimate the effect of paternal leave take-up on child care involvement if these fathers were more involved already before they took leave.

To circumvent this problem, a few studies have exploited parental leave reforms, which increased the take-up of leave by fathers, and compared the child care or housework involvement or wages of fathers with children born shortly before the reform with men who became fathers shortly after the reform. Schober (2014) found that child care time on weekdays of West German fathers increased in the first couple of years after childbirth after the introduction of a father leave quota of two months and income-related leave compensation in 2007. By contrast, the introduction of a one-month father leave quota in Sweden in 1995 seems to have had no effect on the amount of leave taken by fathers for the care of sick children (Ekberg et al. 2013). Kotsadam and Finseraas (2011) found that 15 years after a Norwegian reform introducing a father leave quota in 1993 couples who had a child shortly after the reform reported a more equal division of household tasks and less frequent conflicts over housework than respondents with children born before the reform. For both reforms, short-term evaluations found no effects of these reforms on fathers' wages (Cools et al. 2011, Johansson 2010). A recent study by Rege and Solli (2013) for the 1993 reform in Norway, however, suggested that fathers' earnings can be seen to decrease significantly when allowing for a two-year phase-in-period until leave by fathers had become more widely used and accepted. They interpreted this as pointing to greater child care involvement of fathers assuming that most of the reduction in earnings was due to voluntary work hours reductions rather than discrimination. After introduction of a five-week father leave quota in Quebec, fathers were found to increase their housework contributions but not their child care involvement beyond the leave period (Patnaik 2014). A longitudinal German study which controlled for fathers' pre-leave work hours and child care involvement found that longer take-up of leave by fathers increased their time with children and reduced their working hours beyond the leave period (Brünning 2014).

Overall, most existing evidence suggests that fathers' leave take-up exceeding a few weeks does contribute to greater involvement in some aspects of domestic work of fathers and a more equal division of labor in couples in the medium-term. However, relatively little is known so far about the precise mechanisms underlying the observed medium- and long-term changes in the division of labor in couples. Further research is also needed to better differentiate between the effects of varying durations of leave and to explore under what circumstances fathers' greater domestic involvements persist or fade over time.

The German government has recently decided to introduce extended parental leave benefits ('Elterngeld Plus', Spiegel Online 2014) for parents who combine their parental leave with part-time employment. In addition, to encourage longer-term changes in the gender division of labor, couples where both partners work 25 to 30 hours per week while also taking leave jointly will receive a bonus. It remains to be seen whether these financial incentives will pave the way for greater prevalence and normative acceptance of a dual earner/dual carer family model where both partners work long part-time hours and share child care while they have young children.

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