

Flexible Working and Flexible Fatherhood - Paternity Leave or Shared Care?

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Flexible Working or Flexible Fathers

Introduction

Paternity leave and fathers' involvement in family life more generally are high on the political agenda with the Deputy Prime Minister launching a consultation exercise in January 2011 to develop a revised policy to be introduced in 2015. The important role that fathers do and should play in childrearing is being increasingly recognised and this is to be welcomed. However, we need to understand what is being proposed and what the intentions of the policy are in order to evaluate its potential impact. Paternity leave cannot be considered in isolation from other elements of family policy and employment policy more generally.

We should also note that while the trade unions have reacted favourably to the announcement and the Confederation of British Industries has given it a cautious welcome the reaction of small business has been hostile. The latter are already concerned about the new regulations to be introduced in April. Given that only about one per cent of small business are likely to be effected and the main costs will be borne by the Government their reaction seems to be more based on a traditional view of the role of fathers than the burden of implementing the regulation.

Paternity and Family Leave

Paternity leave was first introduced into the UK in 2005 as a statutory right for fathers. Fathers are entitled to two weeks paid paternity leave provided it is taken within 56 days of the birth of the child, subject to meeting the eligibility criteria. Statutory Paternity Pay is £124.88 a week (£128.73 from April 2011) or 90 per cent of average earnings if lower. From April 2011 fathers can take any maternity leave (52 weeks in total) not taken by the mother including receiving the balance of Statutory Maternity Pay (33 weeks following 6 weeks on 90% of pay) due if the mother returns to work after 20 weeks.

Parents can also take up to 13 weeks unpaid leave for each child up to the child's 5th birthday and have the right to request a reasonable amount of emergency leave. Also while they have at least one child under six years parents have a right to request flexible working. This is not a legal entitlement and is granted at the discretion of employers.

The Proposal for Reforming Paternity Leave

The proposed reform would enable parents to divide the 52 weeks maternity leave between them after the first two months which would be taken by the mother. Parents would be able to divide the leave up however they wished including taking leave together.

The aim of the proposed policy seems to be to:

- enable fathers to play a larger role in childcare while their children are very young;
- make it more acceptable for men to take on a caring role;
- reduce the burden of childcare on women;
- enable women to return to work sooner thus reducing the negative impact of maternity leave on women's careers;
- benefit children who will be able to develop stronger bonds with their fathers.

Policy Context and Issues

Paternity leave in the UK is about fathers having leave to be with their young children, while parental leave is more concerned with enabling parents to work and care. The Coalitions proposed policy is only concerned with amending paternity leave regulations. Reference is made to enabling mothers to return to work sooner than they might otherwise have done but the main intended beneficiaries are fathers and possibly children. Fathers are portrayed as both wanting to spend more time with their children and to needing to be encouraged to do so. The announcement is strangely silent on how parents and especially fathers are going to be able to afford to take time off work. This is of concern because we know that the majority of mothers do not take their full entitlement to maternity leave for financial reasons.

Whilst the majority of women (including mothers) are in paid employment women continue to bare a much greater burden of domestic and caring work than men. Whilst men are taking on more responsibility for childcare they contribute little to domestic work even when their wives are in paid employment and they have young children. The higher earnings potential of men, employer attitudes and general social attitudes all combine to discourage men taking on caring and domestic roles. The consequences are that mothers take on the main burden of care and domestic work and loose out in terms of employment and career prospects. Even women in professional and managerial jobs pay a penalty for motherhood – one that fathers do not pay. Thus the gendered labour market, employer attitudes and general social attitudes combine to discriminate against mothers – gender equality has not been a consideration in the family balance policies introduced in the UK.

The Impact of Paternity Leave and Parental Leave Policies

Most Western European countries have paternity leave policies, many providing for longer leave for fathers and better financial compensation than in the UK. Research comes to broadly similar conclusions:

1. Fathers are more likely to take paternity (daddy) leave if it is non-transferable and is well compensated (at least 50 per cent of usual earnings). Even in countries where this is the case the numbers of fathers taking up the leave are relatively small;
2. Better educated men, those who have higher hourly earnings and men with wives in professional and managerial jobs are those most likely to take paternity leave;
3. When fathers take up paternity leave mothers tend to return to work sooner;
4. If the intention is for fathers to become more involved in childcare then fathers should not take leave at the same time as mothers;
5. Even in the Scandinavian countries where fathers are more likely to take paternity leave progress towards greater gender equity in work/life balance has been very slow;
6. Fathers who take more than two weeks leave become more involved and stay more involved in infant and childcare when they return to work than other fathers;
7. The involvement of fathers in child rearing has a positive impact on the social and cognitive development of children;
8. Employers discourage men from taking parental and are much more likely to refuse a request for flexible working from a man than from a woman;
9. Parents decisions about taking leave (paternity and parental) are influenced by the greater earning power of men and generally better career prospects;

10. Fathers who work shorter hours are more likely to be involved in childcare than those who work longer hours, yet fathers tend to work longer hours than non-fathers. The main exception to this is France where a 35 hour week is enforced;
11. In the UK family friendly policies continue to promote and reinforce the view that the mother is the main carer. Therefore, more attention needs to be paid to parental leave if the intention is to promote parents sharing work and care;
12. Material factors, the ideology of the male breadwinner and fathers seen as helping rather than sharing care tend to remain dominant facts;
13. Paternity leave does not address the main issues of parents sharing work and care. It does not begin to address the main issues that leave women as mainly responsible for juggling work and care. These are: the lack of affordable, flexible childcare; the gendered segregated and segmented labour market meaning that generally women are able to earn less than men; cultural attitudes that construct women as carers and men as providers; and the way in which cultural attitudes and structural factors interact to enable fathers to provide little support with childcare.

Discussion and Policy Recommendations

It is evident that paternity leave can enable fathers to take a more active role in caring for young children and that fathers who take paternity leave continue to be more involved in childcare than fathers who do not. Fathers' involvement in childcare has a positive impact on the cognitive and emotional development of children. Paternity leave is most likely to be taken when it is reserved for fathers and is well compensated, and by better educated fathers with wives in well paid jobs. However, it does little to promote a more balanced sharing of work and care between mothers and fathers because it leaves untouched the main barriers to a sharing of work and care.

If the Government wishes to introduce a paternity leave scheme that will encourage fathers to take up the leave and become more involved in child care then:

1. A period of leave of more than two weeks should be reserved just for fathers – take it or lose it;
2. Paternity leave should be well compensated;
3. Fathers should not be able to take paternity leave at the same time as mothers are on maternity leave;
4. The Government needs to promote the importance of men being involved in childcare and encourage employers to support men in taking paternity leave.

If the Government wishes to promote fathers being more involved in childcare more generally it also needs to:

1. Enforce shorter working hours to stop a long hour's culture among fathers and enable them to participate in family life;
2. Amend legislation on entitlement to flexible working so that employers have to justify refusing requests and provide incentives for employers to introduce family friendly policies;
3. Compensate parental leave for parents with children under five and a proportion of it should be ring fenced for fathers.

If the Government wishes to enable mothers and fathers to have paid employment and share care it also needs to:

1. Progress measures to promote gender equity in the labour market and especially to reduce the gender pay gap;
2. Ensure that working parents have access to high quality affordable and flexible childcare, including after school and holiday care for school aged children.

Reading

Abbott, P and Wallace, C. (2011). *Work and Care: Policy Recommendations from Reconciling Work and Care for Parents with Dependent Children* www.workcaresynergies.eu

Almqvist, A. (2008). Why Most Swedish Fathers and Few French Fathers Use Paid Paternity Leave: An Exploratory Qualitative Study. *Fathering: A Journal of Theory and Practice about Men as Fathers*: 6, 192-200.

Braun, A., Vincent, C. and Ball, S. J. (2011) Working-class Fathers and Childcare: The Economic and Family Contexts of Fathering in the UK. *Community, Work and Family*: 14, 19-37.

Hobson, B. and Fahlen, S. ((2009). Competing Scenarios for European Fathers: Applying Sen's Capabilities Framework and Agency Framework to Work-Family Balance. *The Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science*: 624, 214 – 233.

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Lammi-Taskula, J. (2008). Doing Fatherhood: Understanding the Gendered Use of Parental Leave in Finland. *Fathering: A Journal of Theory and Practice about Men as Fathers*: 6, 133-148.

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Miller, T. (2010) 'It's a Triangle That's Difficult to Square'. Men's Intentions and Practices around Caring, Work and First-Time Fatherhood. *Fathering: A Journal of Theory and Practice about Men as Fathers*: 8, 362-37.

Nepomnyaschy, L. and Waldfogel, J. (2007). PaternityLeave and Fathers' Involvement with their Young Children: Evidence from the American Ecls-B. *Community, Work and Family*:10, 427-453.

O'Brien, M. (2009) Fathers Parental Leave Policies, and Infant Quality of Life: International Perspectives and Policy Impact. *The Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science*:624, 190-231.

Tanaka, S. and Waldfogel, J. (2007) Effects of Parental Leave and Work Hours on Fathers' Involvement with their Babies. *Community, Work and Family*:10, 409-426.

Torella, E. (2007). New Labour, New Dads- The Impact of Family Friendly Legislation on Fathers. *Industrial Law Journal*: 36, 318-328.

Authors

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Professor Wallace and Professor Abbott are authoring a book, *Combining Work and Care: Strategies of Dual Earner Parents with Young Children*, to be published by Palgrave Macmillian in 2011

Workcare Synergies

This policy issues briefing has been funded from the EU Workcare Synergies project.

Project	WORKCARE SYNERGIES Dissemination of Research Framework Programme
Coordinator Consortium	Institute for Advanced Studies (IHS), Austria University of Aberdeen(UNIABDN), Scotland , UK Roskilde University (UNIRUC), Denmark Vienna University of Economics and Business (WU Wien), Austria TARKI Social Research Institute(TARKI), Hungary University of Warsaw (UWAR), Poland University of Florence (UNIFI), Italy CIES-ISCTE (CIES-ISCTE), Portugal University of Brighton(UOB), England, UK
European Commission	Marc Goffart, DG Research
Duration & Budget	January 2010 – December 2011, 600,000 Euros
Funding Scheme	Seventh Framework Programme Theme 8 Socio-economic sciences and humanities (SSH) 8.1 Measures to support dissemination of research results
Website	www.workcaresynergies.eu
Coordinators	Dr Michaela Gstrein, gstrein@ihs.ac.at Dr Lillian Mateeva, mateeva@ihs.ac.at

WORKCARE SYNERGIES is a support action with the aim of disseminating research findings of previous EU Framework Programme projects in the field of work-care. Our dissemination scheme is based on the concept of local key mediator teams, which are based in each of the seven countries where dissemination will take place. The mediator teams consist of local researchers, knowledge transfer and communication specialists. Local teams will implement local dissemination activities.

WORKCARE SYNERGIES will:

- collect, select and prepare relevant findings from different existing FP projects
- in the form of (theme-specific and target-group oriented) discussion materials
- and other dissemination tools (e.g. film, newsletter, folder, poster, homepage, etc.)
- to make existing research findings available
- to NGOs, policy makers, trade unions, labour representatives, regional organizations and services, companies, other local actors, interested parties, etc.
- in local dissemination events and
- summarize material and discussion results for publication.

What? The British team will “translate” (i.e. collect, summarize, make understandable and accessible) findings from existing research projects within the EU Framework Programmes and initiate their discussion in a local context.

Where? This British team will implement local dissemination activities in north of Britain. Locations of dissemination are Scotland (Edinburgh) and London.

Whom to reach? Through local events (1) in Scotland with the Grampian Research Network bringing together representatives from NGOs and local government officers (top/all levels) in the North of Scotland, who are normally out of the seminar/policy making loop due to their scattered and remote locations, (2) at the Scottish Government (top level) to bring together policy makers and members of Parliament in Scotland and (3) with policy makers (top/all levels) and NGOs through the Work Foundation in London. Through policy briefs: NGOs and policy makers (top/all levels) in Scotland and London. Through press: general public (e.g. newspapers). Through newsletter: all interested parties. Through panel discussions: exchange with user groups.

What will be disseminated?: We will disseminate research findings from the following projects:

- WORKCARE (2006-2009), a project on the social quality and changing relationships between work, care and welfare in Europe.
- HWF (2000-2003), a project on households, work and flexibility.
- CINEFOGO (2005-2009), a project on civil society and new forms of Governance in Europe.
- RECOWE (2006-2011), a project on reconciling work and welfare in Europe.
- EQUALSOC (2005-2010), a project on economic change, quality of life and social cohesion.

Links to EU Funded Research

BETWIXT, FP 4 (1998-2001)

Between Integration and Exclusion: A Comparative Study in Local Dynamics of Precarity and Resistance to exclusion in Urban Contexts,

http://ec.europa.eu/research/social-sciences/projects/004_en.html,

[http://cordis.europa.eu/search/index.cfm?fuseaction=lib.document&DOC_LANG_ID=EN&DOC_ID=70595561&pid=0&q=D6A7242FAF4F2B562806FB0098CBA5C6&type=sim](http://cordis.europa.eu/search/index.cfm?fuseaction=lib.document&DOC_LANG_ID=EN&DOC_ID=70595561&pid=0&q=D6A7242FAF4F2B562806FB0098CBA5C6&type=sim;);

http://cordis.europa.eu/search/index.cfm?fuseaction=proj.document&PJ_RCN=3892967&CFID=9436454&CFTOKEN=40542624&jsessionid=3c3080aa642408862019603c3517e5652186TR

CINEFOGO, FP6, NoE (2005-2009),

Civil Society and New Forms of Governance in Europe – The Making of European Citizenship,

http://ec.europa.eu/research/social-sciences/projects/325_en.html, <http://www.cinefogo.org/>

EQUALSOC, FP6, NoE (2005-2010)

Economic Change, Quality of Life and Social Cohesion

http://ec.europa.eu/research/social-sciences/projects/332_en.html,

<http://www.equalsoc.org/>

HWF, FP5 (2000-2003)

Households, Work and Flexibility,

http://ec.europa.eu/research/social-sciences/projects/057_en.html;

<http://www.hwf.at>

IFAC, FP6 (2006-2008)

Information for a choice: Empowering young women through learning for technical professions and science careers, Science and society,

<http://www.ifac-project.eu/>;

http://cordis.europa.eu/fetch?CALLER=FP6_PROJ&ACTION=D&DOC=1&CAT=PROJ&QUERY=012467c16d03:55ec:05ce7a3e&RCN=81260

IMISCOE, FP6, NoE (2004-2009)

International Migration Integration and Social Cohesion

http://ec.europa.eu/research/social-sciences/projects/219_en.html,

<http://www.imiscoe.org/>

MULTILINK, FP7 (2008-2011)

How demographic changes shape intergenerational solidarity, well-being, and social integration: a multilinks framework,

http://ec.europa.eu/research/social-sciences/projects/417_en.html;

<http://www.multilinks-project.eu/info/workpackages>;

<http://multilinks-project.eu/info/papers>

MOCHO: Combining Work and Motherhood, FP5 (2001-2004)

The Rationale of Motherhood Choices: Influence of Employment Conditions and Public Policies,

http://ec.europa.eu/research/social-sciences/projects/075_en.html

Meta-Analysis of Gender and Science Research, FP7 (2008-),

<http://www.genderandscience.org/web/index.php>;

Austrian country report: http://www.genderandscience.org/doc/CReport_Austria.pdf

QUALITY, FP6 (2006-2009)

Family, Work and Social Care in Europe

http://ec.europa.eu/research/social-sciences/projects/267_en.html

RECWOWE, FP6, NoE (2006-2011)

Reconciling Work and Welfare in Europe

http://ec.europa.eu/research/social-sciences/projects/336_en.html;

<http://www.recwowe.eu/>

SOCCARE FP5 (2000-2003)

Family, Work and Social Care in Europe

http://ec.europa.eu/research/social-sciences/projects/102_en.html,

<http://www.uta.fi/laitokset/sospol/soccare/>

The Gender Challenge in Research Funding. Assessing the European national scenes, FP7, Capacities,

http://ec.europa.eu/research/science-society/document_library/pdf_06/the-gender-challenge-in-research-funding-report_en.pdf

TRANSITIONS, FP5 (2003-2005)

Gender, parenthood and the changing European workplace: young adults negotiating the work-family boundary

<http://www.ist->

[world.org/ProjectDetails.aspx?ProjectId=ec29a0fe4879480287671ca3bbe9aae3&SourceDatabaseId=9cd97ac2e51045e39c2ad6b86dce1ac2](http://www.ist-world.org/ProjectDetails.aspx?ProjectId=ec29a0fe4879480287671ca3bbe9aae3&SourceDatabaseId=9cd97ac2e51045e39c2ad6b86dce1ac2)

TRANSLAM, FP4 (1996-1999)

Social integration by Transitional Labour Markets: new pathways for labour market policy (This research was subsequently developed into TLM.net (see below)

http://cordis.europa.eu/search/index.cfm?fuseaction=acro.document&AC_LANG=EN&AC_RCN=1492101&pid=0&q=8550014896997D6B63BD5EE5685C7441&type=sim

TLM.net, FP5 (2002-2006)

Managing Social Risks Through Transitional Labour Markets

http://ec.europa.eu/research/social-sciences/projects/130_en.html

Women in European Universities, FP5, Training and Research Network (2000-2003)

<http://csn.uni-muenster.de/women-eu/>

WORKCARE, FP6 (2006-2009)

Social quality and the changing relationships between work, care and welfare in Europe,

http://ec.europa.eu/research/social-sciences/projects/232_en.html;

<http://www.abdn.ac.uk/socsci/research/nec/workcare/>

WORKS Changes in Work FP6 (2005-2009)

Work Organisation and Restructuring in a knowledge society

http://ec.europa.eu/research/social-sciences/projects/322_en.html,

<http://www.worksproject.be/>

WORKING AND MOTHERING, FP5 (1998-2001)

Working and Mothering: Social Practices and Social Policies

http://ec.europa.eu/research/social-sciences/projects/117_en.html