

Is Fatherhood Becoming More Visible at Work? Trends in Corporate Support for Fathers Taking Parental Leave in Sweden

LINDA HAAS

Indiana University-Indianapolis

C. PHILIP HWANG

Göteborg University

Swedish legislation grants fathers paid parental leave, but mothers still take the majority of leave days available. Workplace opposition is often cited for why men don't take more leave. This study analyzes trends in company support for fathers taking parental leave and explores possible correlates of corporate support. Over time, companies have become more supportive of fathers leave-taking, partly attributed to women's increased share of top management positions. However, the majority of companies are still unsupportive. Moreover, a class bias in support found to some extent in 1993 was more in evidence in 2006, with companies reporting that white-collar fathers receive more formal support from the company and more informal support from co-workers and managers than blue-collar fathers receive.

Keywords: parental leave, Sweden, fatherhood, employment

Parental leave is now a legislated right for fathers in almost every industrialized society. However, there are only a few nations where it has the potential to move corporations toward a supportive culture that promotes work-family integration for men and women and parents' sharing early childcare. To realize this potential, parental leave must be a universal, individual, non-transferable right of fathers as well as mothers. Fathers must be encouraged to take leave and employers must be obligated to accommodate such leave. Parental leave must offer job protection, full benefits and substantial wage compensation as a symbol of its social value and to facilitate use by both parents. Lastly, it must be flexibly administered so parents can take turns, and take leave part- and full-time (Haas, 2003).

Linda Haas, Department of Sociology, Indiana University-Indianapolis; C. Philip Hwang, Department of Psychology, Göteborg University, Göteborg, Sweden.

This research was financed by the Ford Foundation, Indiana University, the Swedish Council for Working Life Research, the Swedish Humanities and Social Science Research Council, and the Wettergren Foundation.

Correspondence concerning this article should be sent to Linda Haas, Department of Sociology, Indiana University-Indianapolis, 425 University Blvd., Indianapolis, IN 46202. Electronic mail: lhaas@iupui.edu

Fathering, Vol. 7, No. 3, Fall 2009, 303-321.

© 2009 by the Men's Studies Press, LLC. <http://www.mensstudies.com>. All rights reserved.

fth.0703.303/\$14.00 DOI: 10.3149/fth.0703.303 Url: <http://dx.doi.org/10.3149/fth.0703.303>



Sweden's parental leave program comes the closest to this ideal. Sweden was the first nation to offer fathers paid parental leave, in 1974. As early as 1977, the National Labor Market Board stated, "The right for men to take responsibility for their children on the same basis as women must be accepted and encouraged" (Arbetsmarknadsstyrelsen, 1977). Sweden was the second nation (after Norway, in 1995) to provide fathers with non-transferable rights to paid parental leave. Currently, legislation grants fathers as well as mothers the right to two non-transferable months of leave, paid at 80 percent of salary up to an income ceiling (approximately \$54,000 in 2007), that can be taken anytime until a child starts school; couples also have an additional nine highly compensated months of leave to divide up between themselves as they choose (Haas, Chronholm, & Hwang, 2008). The Swedish government has been extraordinarily active in promoting fathers' use of parental leave since men were extended the right in 1974. According to Klinth (2008), recent publicity efforts promote a more radical shared responsibility of men for childcare (rather than freedom of choice). There is intense international interest in Sweden's parental leave program because of its potential to undermine the gendered linkages between family and work and enhance the participation of fathers in childcare.

Despite its potential, the program has not met the policymaking goal of fathers taking as much parental leave as mothers. Although most (90%) fathers take parental leave, in 2007 mothers still took 79 percent of all days taken (Haas et al, 2008). Most research on the barriers to men taking leave focuses on what keeps *individual men* from taking more leave (Statens Offentliga Utredningar [SOU], 2005). Following the social constructionist perspective on gender, our research has focused instead on the social conditions that discourage *men as a group* from sharing leave more equitably. A gender lens on fatherhood and work emphasizes how men's private choices about how much leave to take are affected by social arrangements over which they have only limited control, such as the traditional organizational culture prevalent in large, profit-seeking companies.

The primary purpose of this article is to report the results of an investigation into trends in the levels of corporate support for fathers taking parental leave in Sweden. Institutional theory would predict that over time Swedish companies will become more supportive of fathers taking parental leave, responding to the larger cultural and political environment which heavily emphasizes shared parenting and gender equality. This study also examines organizational factors related to corporate support for fathers' leavetaking and suggests prospects for the future, based on a longitudinal study of large profit-seeking corporations.

Previous Research on Corporate Support

The Influence of the Workplace on Men's Leavetaking

Workplaces have traditionally been organized around a work-life model that assumes that the average worker (a man) arrives at work unencumbered by family re-

sponsibilities, so that employers need not offer workers flexibility to give family care (Acker, 1990). While some workplaces have adapted themselves to a workforce that includes mothers, most companies give little consideration to children's relations with fathers and have rendered fatherhood invisible at work (Hojgaard, 1997). For gender equality to be reached, workplace practices must support a "presumption of shared parenting," whereby fathers are regarded as capable, willing, and involved parents, and where both fathers and mothers are responsible for children's development (Russell, James, & Watson, 1988). One such workplace practice involves supporting fathers who want to take advantage of legislation that offers them the right to take parental leave to care for young children. The European Foundation's Establishment Survey on Working Time and Work-Life Balance of companies in 21 countries, conducted in 2004-05, found that companies were more likely to report fathers taking parental leave if fathers had a statutory entitlement to leave. They also found that the nation with the highest reported rate for companies having fathers taking leave was Sweden, with 69 percent (Anxo, Fagan, & Smith, 2007).

Several research studies have found that the more support fathers perceive they have at the workplace, the more likely they are to take parental leave. For example, Smeaton (2006) studied 1,200 UK fathers with children ages 3-15 months and found that fathers were more likely to take parental leave if they described their employers as "supportive." Thompson, Vinter, and Young (2005), using the same data set, found that fathers took longer leave when their bosses were perceived to be very supportive. A 1996 study of 317 fathers in six western Swedish companies discovered that fathers were more likely to take leave when they perceived support from top management and likely to take more days of leave when their work groups were rated as flexible and adaptive (Haas, Allard, & Hwang, 2002). Using data on 6,243 new fathers in Stockholm, Bygren and Duvander (2004) found that men took more parental leave if fathers at their workplace had taken leave in the two preceding years, which the researchers regard as the establishment of a workplace norm for fathers' leavetaking.

It is common for parents to blame fathers' workplaces for why parental leave is not shared more between mothers and fathers. Lammi-Taskula (2007), analyzing survey data involving 3,232 mothers and 1,413 fathers in Finland, found that among couples where the fathers had not taken leave, two-thirds (65%) of mothers and half (49%) of fathers claimed that difficulties arranging things at work was what kept fathers from taking leave. The study by Brandth and Kvande (2001) of 1,600 Norwegian men who became fathers during 1994-95 found that the most important reason fathers gave for not taking advantage of their non-transferable right to paid parental leave was that they could not consider taking a leave of absence from their jobs. Research by Rostgaard, Christoffersen, and Weise (1999) on 741 Danish parents with children born between 1984 and 1989 found that about one-fifth of fathers and mothers said the main obstacle to fathers taking leave was that "the father's work did not allow him to be on parental leave." Rost (1999) studied 1,000 German fathers and discovered that concerns about missing work was the second most often cited reason for fathers not taking leave; some fathers feared they would be fired even though the law guaranteed their

return to the job while others were afraid they would “lose touch” with work and miss advancement opportunities.

In 2003, the European Union’s Eurobarometer survey asked 16,000 Europeans what they thought would encourage fathers to take parental leave. The fourth most commonly cited option (of nine), mentioned by 23 percent, was “a more open-minded attitude towards parental leave from superiors and colleagues at work” (European Opinion Research Group, 2004). Of the 15 countries studied, Swedish citizens were more likely than all others to think that more open-minded workplace attitudes would increase acceptance of men’s use of parental leave, with 43 percent so indicating.

Some recent studies specifically of Swedish parents have also shown that parents blame the father’s workplace for fathers not taking more parental leave. The 2003 study by Josefsson (2007) of 3,164 parents of Swedish children born 1993-1999 found that parents claimed that a lack of support at fathers’ workplaces was one of the most important reasons for fathers not taking more parental leave. Elvin-Nowak’s (2005) qualitative study of 20 Swedish couples found that fathers and mothers considered negative attitudes of employers, managers and co-workers to be one of the main determinants of how much parental leave fathers took. One thousand Swedish parents of children aged 1½ to 3 years interviewed in 2005 reported that negative attitudes at the father’s workplace did not have a major impact on their decision-making about which parent took leave, but said instead that a positive attitude from those at the father’s workplace would make a difference (SOU, 2005).

It is clear that parents in many nations perceive workplace attitudes as a barrier to fathers taking leave. However, Bekkengen (2002) suggests that the impact of Swedish employers’ negative attitudes has been overstated. She followed eight Swedish couples from before they had children until both parents were back at work after parental leave, interviewing employers and co-workers as well as parents. She concluded that Swedish men have considerable latitude in asking for leave at the workplace, although it is easier for them to be absent when they work as part of a collective team with co-workers who have similar training than if they have individual competence that is difficult to replace temporarily. Lammi-Taskula (2007) mentions in her discussion of fathers taking leave in Finland that employers may not directly stand in the way of fathers taking leave; fathers themselves may interpret their job situation as not permitting them to take time off. Kvande (2008), considering Norwegian fathers, agrees: “There is no need for the employer to control the workers, the control is internalized or embodied in the worker” (p. 84).

Previous studies of determinants of Swedish fathers’ taking parental leave have discovered social class is associated with shared leavetaking. More well-educated fathers are more likely than lesser educated fathers to take parental leave (e.g., Sundström & Duvander, 2002). It is often assumed that less well-educated fathers hold more traditional values concerning family and work, and thus are less interested in sharing parental leave. An alternative explanation explored in this study is that opportunities for work-family reconciliation (such as support for taking parental leave) can be distributed unequally within companies, reinforcing class differences, what Lambert and

Haley-Lock (2004, p. 179) label as “the organizational stratification of opportunities for work-life balance.” Haas (2005) suggests that it is important to investigate if the model for shared parenting promulgated by Swedish policymakers is universally upheld within companies, or if it is instead promoted to one socioeconomic group over another. Following the social constructionist perspective on gender, our research examines the extent to which blue-collar fathers *as a group* may be discouraged by their workplaces from sharing leave more equitably by specific policies and workplace practices, while white-collar fathers as a group may be encouraged by others. Following economic rationality theory, companies may be more concerned with retaining and supporting highly qualified fathers who cannot be easily replaced.

Workplace Characteristics Associated with Leavetaking

Previous research gives us some clues concerning what organizational characteristics might be associated with fathers’ taking parental leave. Factors that have received the most attention include organizational size, organizational sector, and extent to which women dominate the organization.

Size is usually considered important because it is assumed that larger companies have more resources with which to cope with leavetaking (e.g., hiring substitutes). As suggested by institutional theory, larger companies might also be under more pressure than smaller ones “to maintain their social legitimacy” by responding to policymakers’ support for fathers’ taking parental leave (Goodman, 1994, p. 376). Larger companies have been found to be more supportive of fathers’ taking parental leave in research in Australia, the UK and the U.S. (Anxo et al., 2007; Galinsky & Bond, 1998; Smeaton, 2006; Whitehouse, Diamond, & Baird, 2007). While one Swedish government study indicated that larger workplaces were more likely to be supportive of fathers’ taking leave (SOU, 2005), the study by Bygren and Duvander (2006) of couples in Stockholm found that fathers were more likely to take leave in smaller workplaces.

Research studies in Sweden have found that fathers working in the private sector take fewer leave days than fathers in the public sector (Haas, 1992; Lundgren, 2006; SOU, 2005). British fathers are also more likely to report employer support for parental leave in the public sector than in the private sector (Thompson et al., 2005). Swedish fathers in the public sector usually receive higher wage compensation for taking leave than fathers in the private sector (e.g., 90 percent vs. 80 percent), because of collective bargaining agreements. Fathers in the public sector are also more likely to work in women-dominated workplaces, where women’s concerns about harmonizing work and family life are more likely to be taken into account. Since the Swedish government has been so active in promoting fathers’ use of parental leave, it seems likely that fathers who work for government authorities would be more exposed than fathers in the private sector to educational campaigns designed to persuade them that taking parental leave is good for children and fathers’ own personal development. Our surveys have focused on fathers in the private sector in order to better understand fathers’ leavetaking in that setting.

The European Foundation study found that companies in the service sector were more likely to support fathers' taking parental leave (Anxo et al., 2007). Some researchers have assumed that women's domination of service jobs is the reason why service companies are supportive of fathers' taking leave, while others have speculated that service occupations are characterized by less traditional, more employee-drive work design that includes an element of flexibility in combining work and family roles (Burd & Tumolo, 2004).

Whether women-dominated workplaces are more friendly toward fathers taking parental leave has not been consistently empirically established. The Danish study by Rostgaard et al. (1999) found that fathers were more likely to take parental leave in women-dominated workplaces, presumably more accustomed to employees combining work and family life, as did the Finnish study of Lammi-Taskula (2007). However, qualitative research by the Work Changes Gender project in 2001-04 in six European countries suggested that women-dominated companies were more interested in advocating women's equal employment opportunities than they were in supporting fathers' rights as caregivers (Holter, 2007). In support of this view, the European Foundation study of companies found fathers were more likely to take leave in companies when fathers outnumbered mothers (Anxo et al., 2007).

Another factor that could be related to companies' support of fathers taking parental leave is business climate. Increased attention has been paid by work-life researchers to establishing the "business case" for companies' support of family life, describing the positive impact that family-friendly benefits can have on business-related outcomes (Dorio, Bryant, & Allen, 2008). There is anecdotal evidence that at least some Swedish companies promote fathers' taking parental leave in order to appear as an attractive employer. In other situations, fathers' taking parental leave is seen as enhancing employees' professional development. One company officer at an insurance company told a reporter as long ago as 1997: "Men become better leaders by being home with their children. It develops a type of social competence that all fathers ought to have" (Högberg, 1997, p. 5, *our translation*). According to economic rationality theory, companies should be more supportive of fathers taking parental leave if doing so enhances recruitment, retention and future productivity. However, economic concerns could still discourage companies from supporting fathers taking parental leave, if such programs are seen as a drain on company's productivity. A study of U.S. companies showed that "business climate" (e.g., need to downsize or cut costs) reduced companies' responsiveness toward families (Galinsky & Bond, 1998).

Study Aims

The major aim of the study reported below is to investigate trends in Swedish companies' support for fathers taking parental leave. Companies are considered to be supportive of fathers taking parental leave when: (a) formal policies and support programs for leavetaking fathers are in place; (b) fathers taking leave experience positive informal support from managers and co-workers; and (c) a large proportion of fathers take

their entitlement to leave, helping to establish a workplace norm of fathers taking leave. We focus on the private sector since the rates of taking parental leave are lower for men in the private than in the public sector. This is the only study we know of that looks over time at levels of corporate support for fathers taking parental leave. Our analysis permits us to compare results from two company surveys involving the same type of companies in 1993 and 2006.

A second major aim of the study was to explore whether there was a class bias in support for fathers' taking leave, and if this was increasing, decreasing or staying the same over time. Questions about formal and informal support for fathers' leavetaking were asked in terms of how they applied to white-collar and blue-collar fathers separately.

Another goal of this study is to explore some factors that might make some companies more supportive of fathers taking parental leave than others, and examine whether these correlates of supportiveness have changed over time. In this regard, we examined non-gendered organizational factors often mentioned as possible determinants of company support for fathers: larger organizational size, being in the service sector, and enjoying a good business climate. We also investigated the role played by gendered organizational factors that reinforce the separation of work and family life and reproduce men's advantage and dominance in the labor market. These factors included three measures of companies' involvement in promoting equal employment opportunity for women: women's share of the workforce, women's share of management, and companies' prioritizing women's advancement. We also looked at the extent to which company values aligned with values that are traditionally associated with women and with the private (family) sphere, which we call an "ethic of caring." This includes concern for others, sense of social responsibility, and preference for collaborative over competitive interaction.

This research offers a unique look into whether or not companies are becoming more supportive of fathers taking parental leave in a society where there is strong encouragement for leave sharing. Results can also be used to speculate about what the future might be for company support for fathers' use of parental leave in Sweden.

Study Methods

Sample

We conducted mail surveys of large corporations in Sweden in 1993 and again in 2006. From the same information source, we obtained lists of companies to study that were the most profitable companies in Sweden during the year preceding each survey; we reduced this list further by including only companies that had 100 or more employees. A traditional mail survey design was carried out, which involved first mailing Swedish-language surveys to personnel officers, then a reminder letter two weeks later, then another copy of the mail survey with a new cover letter, followed by a phone call to establish eligibility and urge response. In 1993 we received surveys back from 200

companies for an 80 percent response rate. In 2006 we received surveys back (from a somewhat larger original list) from 244 companies, for a 71 percent response rate.

Companies ranged in size in 1993 from 103 to 25,000 employees (median = 800). In 2006, companies were significantly smaller in size, ranging from 100 to 17,000 workers (median = 580). In 1993, 23 percent of the companies responding to the survey were service-oriented, with 46 percent in manufacturing and 24 percent in retail. In 2006, a higher proportion of companies were service-oriented (36%); the same proportion was in manufacturing (45%) and significantly fewer were in retail (19%). At both times, companies tended to have workforces dominated by men. In 1993, 90 percent of the companies reported workforces that were 61 percent or more male, while in 2006, 93 percent reported workforces that were 61 percent or more male. In 1993, 95 percent of top managers were men; by 2006, 82 percent still were.

Measurement Techniques

We measured the extent of formal policies and programs by asking personnel officers if their companies had any of the following six supports in place: a formal decision to support fathers taking leave, recordkeeping on fathers taking leave, formal programs to encourage blue-collar and white-collar fathers to take leave (asking about each separately), a group or person designated to encourage fathers to take leave, and whether any man in top management had taken parental leave. The latter was included as a measure of formal support since a role model taking leave at the highest level sends a strong message about what the company's policy is about fathers and leave taking. We analyzed these items separately and also used the six items to create a Formal Support Scale, by adding up how many of these supports each company had. In 1993, the six formal support items did not form a reliable scale (because so few companies reported formal support), but by 2006 the items had modest reliability (Cronbach's reliability coefficient, $\alpha = .67$). When a company lacked blue-collar workers, their score for white-collar workers was used in computing the scale.

We measured levels of informal support by asking personnel officers four questions concerning the reaction fathers typically received from their managers and co-workers when they took leave, inquiring about white-collar and blue-collar fathers separately. Reactions were gauged on a five-point scale, ranging from very positive to very negative; responses were then recoded to indicate whether reactions were positive (very positive or somewhat positive) or not. Each item was analyzed separately; the responses of all four were added together to develop an Informal Support Scale. The Informal Support Scale was found to be reliable in both years (Cronbach's $\alpha = .78$ in 1993 and $.89$ in 2006). When a company lacked blue-collar workers, their score for white-collar workers was used in computing the scale.

Our last measure of corporate support for fathers was the presence of an established norm for fathers' leavetaking, measured by the reported proportion of fathers using parental leave. This question was asked somewhat differently in the two surveys, reflecting changes in fathers' rights to take leave, but we believe the data from the two

years to be comparable. In 1993, companies were asked “about what percentage” of fathers in their company took leave, picking from among seven categories. In 2006, they were asked what proportion of fathers in their company took their entitlement of non-transferable leave, using six categories. For comparison purposes, both measures were recoded into the same five categories (0%, 1-20%, 21-40%, 41-60%, and 61%+).

A secondary goal of the study was to explore which companies were more supportive of fathers taking parental leave. In this regard, we examined whether there was a significant association between formal support, informal support, and fathers’ use of leave with non-gendered organizational characteristics that have been discussed as potential predictors of work-family culture, including company size, sector (service vs. manufacturing and retail), and perceived business climate (specifically, how important cost cutting and boosting worker productivity was just now: very important, somewhat important, not very important).

We also looked at the associations between corporate support for fathers taking leave and organizational characteristics associated with the gendered substructure of work organizations. Accordingly, we measured women’s share of the workforce and women’s share of top management positions, as well as how important respondents reported the company to consider women’s advancement in the company to be (very, somewhat or not very important). The fourth gendered organizational characteristic measured was companies’ adherence to caring values. A seven-item Ethic of Caring Scale was developed with responses to questions about the extent to which the following were characteristic of the company, in comparison to other companies in their area: taking social responsibility, exhibiting a long-term orientation, collaboration, encouraging employee discussion of policy, taking employees’ viewpoints seriously, respecting individual rights, offering employees advancement opportunities, and offering employees good pay and benefits. Cronbach’s reliability coefficient (*alpha*) for this scale in 1993 was .77 and .69 in 2006. Higher scores on this measure would indicate that companies are crossing the boundary of separate spheres to incorporate values from the private sphere into the public and to accept some values traditionally associated with women.

To investigate what variables might be important predictors of company support for fathers taking leave, zero-order correlations were calculated as well as multiple regression to see which variables had strong independent relationships with company support, controlling for other factors in the study. To examine whether there were any differences between white-collar and blue-collar fathers receipt of support for taking parental leave, *t*-tests for independent samples were calculated. One-tailed tests of significance were used.

Results and Discussion

Trends in Formal Support

Results indicate a dramatic and statistically significant increase in companies’ reports of having formal policies and practices to encourage fathers to take parental leave,

between 1993 and 2006 (see Table 1). This applied to total scores for the Formal Support Scale and for all individual items in the scale. In 1993, the mean score for this scale was only .60 out of 6 (i.e., 10% of the total possible score); by 2006, the mean score was 2.60 (43% of the total possible). In 1993, only two percent of companies reported that they had made a formal decision to encourage fathers to take parental leave, but by 2006—in response certainly to legislation that meantime granting men two non-transferable months of leave—41 percent report having made this decision. Other dra-

Table 1
*Extent of Corporate Support for Fathers' Taking Leave**

Percentage of companies reporting	1993 survey (N = 200)	2006 survey (N = 244)
<i>Formal support for parental leave</i>		
Policy decision to support fathers' leave taking	2	41
Recordkeeping on leave taking	19	40
Formal program to encourage blue-collar fathers to take leave	1	34
Formal program to encourage white-collar fathers to take leave	4	48
Group/person designated to encourage fathers to take leave	2	7
Leave taking by men in top management	32	88
Reported five or more of the six types of formal support	0	14
<i>Informal support for parental leave</i>		
Positive reaction by managers when blue-collar men want to take leave	10	30
Positive reaction by managers when white-collar men want to take leave	10	37
Positive reaction by co-workers when blue-collar men want to take leave	18	39
Positive reaction by co-workers when white-collar men want to take leave	26	46
All four types of informal support	5	26
<i>Fathers use of parental leave</i>		
No fathers took leave	2	0
1-20 per cent of fathers took leave	70	42
21-40 per cent of fathers took leave	16	33
41-60 per cent of fathers took leave	9	9
61 per cent or more of fathers took leave	2	15

* All comparisons were statistically significant, at $p \leq .05$. We used chi square to evaluate whether the proportions of companies offering the various types of support were significantly different between the two years; also whether companies were more likely to support white-collar fathers than blue-collar fathers. When variation in the data did not meet the conditions for using chi square, z-tests for evaluating differences between proportions were used instead. We used t-tests for comparing means from independent samples to assess whether scale scores were significantly different by year.

The sample size is reduced for variables concerning blue-collar fathers, since 32 companies in 1993 and 24 companies in 2006 only had white-collar fathers.

matic differences were found in terms of companies' offering of formal programs to encourage fathers to take leave, which by 2006 was true for almost half the companies (48%). In both years, the strongest sign of formal support for fathers taking leave was the fact that a man in top management had done so. In 1993, about one-third (32%) of companies reported that a man in top management had taken leave; by 2006, almost all (88%) did.

Despite these vast improvements in the number of formal supports for fathers taking leave, results also suggest that there is still a long way to go to have most companies become strongly supportive of policymakers' goal of fathers taking half of available parental leave. By 2006, well over half (59%) of companies had *not* made a formal decision to support men taking parental leave, which is surprising since legislation clearly indicates that all fathers have the right to such leave. Moreover, only 14 percent offered five or more of the six types of support we studied. The aspect of formal support that companies were the least likely to report was a person/group designated to encourage fathers to take leave. Only two percent of companies reported this in 1993, while only seven percent reported this in 2006.

The only formal measure reported by a majority of companies in 2006 was having a man in top management take leave. We asked how often men in top management took parental leave in 2006 (but not in 1993), and only one third (34%) of companies reported this occurred "rather often" or "very often." Therefore, for most companies, top management is still sending the message that a father at the top taking parental leave is not everyday workplace practice.

Progress in companies providing formal support for fathers taking leave also appears to have a growing class bias. While there was a remarkable increase in formal programs to encourage fathers to take parental leave, there were still significantly more formal programs directed toward white-collar workers than to blue-collar workers. In 2006, only one third (34%) of companies had formal programs to encourage blue-collar fathers to take parental leave, compared to almost half (48%) of companies that had programs for white-collar fathers. In 1993, when programs were scarce, the difference was much smaller (1% for blue-collar fathers and 4% for white-collar fathers).

Trends in Informal Support

Informal support for fathers taking parental leave increased significantly between 1993 and 2006, although not as dramatically as formal support did. The average score on the Informal Support Scale was significantly higher in 2006 (mean = 1.55, 39% of all possible points) than it was in 1993 (mean = .68, only 17% of possible points). Over time, companies reported significantly more positive reactions by both co-workers and managers for both blue-collar and white-collar fathers taking leave (see Table 1). Co-workers were reported to be significantly more supportive than managers in both years.

Still, informal support for fathers taking parental leave was not widespread. By 2006, positive reactions to fathers taking parental leave on the part of managers and co-workers were reported by less than half of companies, and only a quarter of companies (26%) reported positive reactions to leave-taking fathers on all four measures of informal support.

Class differences in informal support evident in 1993 were found at about the same level as in 2006, with white-collar fathers still experiencing more informal support for taking leave from both managers and co-workers than blue-collar workers did. In 1993, 10 percent of both groups were regarded as receiving support for taking leave from managers. By 2006, 37 percent of white-collar fathers and 30 percent of blue-collar fathers were reported to have managerial support (a significant difference). In 1993, support from co-workers for white-collar workers taking leave was reported by 26 percent of companies while support for blue-collar workers was reported to be 18 percent. By 2006, almost half (46 percent) of white-collar co-workers were reported as supporting male co-workers' leave, while 39 percent of blue-collar co-workers were perceived as positive.

Trends in the Establishment of a Norm for Fathers' Leavetaking

To examine whether it was becoming more normative for fathers to take leave, we compared leave usage rates for fathers in the two years, and found a statistically significant increase (see Table 1). This was expected since government policy had in the meantime mandated non-transferable leave to fathers. In 1993, almost three-quarters of companies (72 percent) indicated that only one in five fathers took leave; by 2006, the proportion of companies with this low rate was down to 42 percent. In 1993, only two percent of companies said that 61 percent or more of fathers in their companies took leave; by 2006 this percentage had increased considerably to 15 percent.

Again, there appears to be quite a distance to go before companies have established fathers' leavetaking as a workplace norm. Since 90 percent of fathers took parental leave in Sweden by 2006, we would expect that almost all companies in 2006 would say that the vast majority of fathers took leave and this was not the case.

Correlations between Types of Support Shown toward Fathers

The three measures of company support for fathers taking parental leave appear to be distinctive aspects of support, not always significantly correlated with one another. For example, in 1993 informal support and formal support scale scores were not significantly associated with each other, but each was significantly associated with percentage of fathers who took leave, even controlling for the effects of the other. In 2006, informal support and formal support scale scores were significantly intercorrelated with each other, but only formal support was significantly correlated with fathers' use of leave. These results suggest that it is important to study several different dimensions of company support for fathers' leavetaking in order to get a more complete picture of this support.

Factors Related to Companies' Support for Fathers' Taking Parental Leave Non-Gendered Organizational Characteristics

Of the non-gendered organizational characteristics studied, business climate variables were the most significant correlates of corporate support for fathers taking

parental leave in 1993. Productivity concerns reduced formal support in 1993, while cost concerns reduced informal support, even controlling for the effects of other predictor variables in the study (see Tables 2 and 3). By 2006, business climate variables were correlated with all three measures of company support, but these effects were no longer significant when all variables were considered simultaneously. We looked to see if there was perhaps a curvilinear relationship of company support with business climate variables by 2006, where some companies might see it as a good idea to encourage fathers to take leave as a way to reduce costs or boost productivity, while others did the opposite, but there was none. We were unable to explain why business climate no longer had a strong independent effect on company support in 2006; these variables were generally not significantly correlated with the gendered company characteristics that retained significance.

Improvements in the stability and growth of the national economy probably helped to increase corporate support for fathers taking leave in Sweden during the 1993-2006 time period. In 1993, when Sweden was suffering a recession, 80 percent of companies

Table 2
*Correlates of Corporate Support for Fathers' Taking Leave**

	1993 survey (N = 200)			2006 survey (N = 244)		
	Formal support scale	Informal support scale	Fathers' leave use	Formal support scale	Informal support scale	Fathers' leave use
<i>Non-gendered organizational characteristics</i>						
Company size	.09	.05	-.07	.05	.06	.00
Company sector (service)	.06	.00	.02	.02	.24*	.08
Cost concerns	.01	-.17*	.11	-.14*	-.11*	-.10
Productivity concerns	-.17*	.02	.04	-.12*	-.07	-.12*
<i>Gendered organizational characteristics</i>						
% workforce women	.00	.12*	.14*	.10	.11*	.12*
% management women	.00	.00	.13*	.14*	.16*	.21*
Prioritize women's advancement	.01	.03	.08	.24*	.10	.06
Caring values scale	.24*	.07	.13*	.32*	.12*	.11*

* This signifies that the result is statistically significant, using one-tailed tests and Pearson zero-order correlations. Because the variable company size (number of employees) was extremely skewed, the log of size was used instead. Because the percentage of management that was women was skewed in 1993, the log of this percentage was used in 1993.

Table 3

Linkages between Corporate Support for Fathers' Taking Parental Leave and Organizational Characteristics - Multiple Regression Results (Standardized beta coefficients)

	1993 survey (N = 200)			2006 survey (N = 244)		
	Formal support scale	Informal support scale	Fathers' leave use	Formal support scale	Informal support scale	Fathers' leave use
<i>Non-gendered organizational characteristics</i>						
Company size (log)	.04	.03	-.08	.02	.05	.01
Company sector (service)	.08	.02	.05	-.05	.20*	.00
Cost concerns	.07	-.17*	.10	-.08	-.06	-.06
Productivity concerns	-.18*	.04	.01	-.09	.01	-.07
<i>Gendered organizational characteristics</i>						
% workforce women	.00	.16*	.12	.12*	.04	.06
% management women**	.06	.06	.09	.13*	.09	.16*
Prioritize women's advancement	.11	.07	.05	.14*	.07	.04
Caring values scale	.21*	.12*	.13*	.24*	.06	.06
Adjusted R squared	.07*	.02	.02	.14*	.06*	.03*

* Indicates that coefficient is statistically significant, at the .05 level for a one-tailed test.

** The log of women's share of management was used in the 1993 survey because of skewness.

reported that enhancing productivity was “very important,” while 75 percent indicated that cost-cutting was very important. By 2006, economic conditions in Sweden were much improved. *No* company in the 2006 survey indicated that enhancing productivity was “very important” for their company, although 44 percent still said cost-cutting was very important. If economic worries increase again to the 1993 level, we would expect that productivity and cost-cutting priorities might again have a substantial dampening effect on the development of corporate support for fathers taking leave.

Service companies were no more likely than manufacturing or other companies to be supportive of fathers taking leave in 1993; by 2006, however, companies in the service sector were significantly more likely than other companies to offer informal support, even controlling for the effects of other variables such as percentage of women in the workforce. Being in the service sector, however, was not related to companies' level of formal support or higher usage rates. This finding supports other studies that suggest

that service-oriented organizations are beginning to offer more flexibility to employees than are companies in other sectors.

Company size was not related to any measure of corporate support in either year, perhaps because our sample excludes small companies with less than 100 employees.

Gendered Organizational Characteristics

Gendered organizational characteristics showed more significant associations with corporate support than non-gendered ones (see Tables 2 and 3). The gendered variable with the most association with corporate support was the Ethic of Caring Scale. In 1993, the more companies had adopted organizational values traditionally associated with women and with the private (family) sphere, involving concern for others, the more likely they were to report formal support, informal support and fathers' use of leave, even controlling for the effects of other variables in the study. In 2006, this scale remained a significant independent predictor of company support for only the Formal Scale, although it was also significantly related to the other two measures of company support in zero-order correlations. This may be due to the fact that the Ethic of Caring Scale was significantly intercorrelated with two gender variables in 2006 that retained their significant influence on company support for fathers (discussed below).

The dramatic improvement in corporate support for fathers taking parental leave in large companies found in our study cannot be attributed to a major increase in the extent to which these companies portrayed themselves as adhering to caring values, since average scores on this scale were nearly identical in both surveys - at 3.46 in 1993 and 3.50 in 2006. Furthermore, companies' scores were not strongly on the positive side of the five-point scale for caring. It is not surprising that caring values are not more dominant in this sample of large companies. Such values can be difficult to develop in the gendered substructure of organizational culture, especially in a short period of time. The amount of support companies can show fathers who take leave will likely be limited, however, until a more basic change in organizational values occurs.

The share of the workforce that was women was not significantly related to companies' scores on the Ethic of Caring Scale. Women's share of the workforce was however a significant independent predictor in our multivariate analysis of companies' scores on the Informal Support Scale in 1993, and with company scores on the Formal Support Scale in 2006. We cannot attribute companies' higher scores on Formal Support in 2006 to any change in the sex distribution of company labor forces. Women's average share of the workforce did not increase between studies, being 33 percent in 1993 and 32 percent in 2006. This suggests that the future prospects for more corporate support of fathers taking leave are reduced as long as women are not more integrated into the labor forces of large companies.

Women's share of management positions in 2006 remained a significant independent predictor of company scores on the Formal Support Scale and norms for fathers' leave use. (See Table 3.) Women made up such a small proportion of the management of large companies we studied in 1993 (5%), that it's not surprising that

few effects on fathers' leavetaking were found. The percentage of women in management significantly increased between the two studies, to 18 percent in 2006, which helps to explain some of the improvement in corporate support for fathers' taking leave.

The importance of women's power in work organizations for company support of fathers taking leave is also evident in the result that companies in 2006 that reported prioritizing women's advancement in the company were more likely to report formal support of fathers taking leave, controlling for other variables in the study. There was a significant increase overtime in companies' viewpoints on this matter, with more support for women's advancement exhibited in 2006 than in 1993. Still, less than one-third (29%) of companies indicated that women's advancement in their companies was "very important." Increasing the number of women in power positions in corporations might have a significant impact on corporate support for fathers taking leave, but there is still a long way to go. Women's share of power in these organizations is still far below their representation in the workforce: in 2006, they were on average 32 percent of the workforce but only 18 percent of the management.

Conclusion

Sweden was the first nation to offer fathers paid parental leave and has arguably made the most effort over time to encourage fathers to take leave. It is therefore an interesting setting to study why mothers still take the vast majority of days available. This report presents results from company surveys conducted in 1993 and 2006, which examined the role of the workplace in fathers taking leave. The companies studied are large and the most profitable in Sweden, exactly where we might expect resistance to fathers' taking leave would be the strongest.

Results show that there has been a dramatic increase in corporate support for fathers taking leave in large Swedish companies, as measured by the presence of formal policies and practices, the amount of informal support shown by co-workers and managers, and the establishment of a norm for fathers' leavetaking. The most dramatic increase was found in formal support, which was almost non-existent in 1993. This increase in corporate support for fathers in Sweden is predicted by institutional theory, which suggests that company policies and practices are shaped by the larger cultural environment in which they are embedded. In Sweden this environment includes prevailing cultural beliefs and values and social policies that support a radical redistribution of rights and responsibilities between men and women. Swedish parental leave policy, which offers high wage compensation and guarantees fathers' entitlement to parental leave to two months, appears to have been successful in reducing corporate resistance toward fathers taking leave, thus helping to make fatherhood more visible at work.

Our surveys also make it clear that the majority of large Swedish companies are still not supportive of fathers taking parental leave. The majority have not made a formal decision to support fathers taking leave, implemented special programs to encourage fathers to take leave, kept records about fathers' leave use or designated someone to encourage fathers to take leave. While the vast majority of companies re-

ported that at least one man in top management had taken parental leave, this was common in only one-third of companies. The majority of companies in 2006 still reported that co-workers and managers typically did not react positively to fathers who wanted to take leave and that most fathers did not yet take much leave.

Sweden prides itself on providing social benefits on a universal basis, but we found evidence that a social class bias is entering into the implementation of this important social benefit. Blue-collar fathers receive significantly less formal and informal support for taking parental leave than white-collar fathers do; the class gap in formal programs has increased over time. The Swedish government recently raised the income ceiling for benefits to encourage more white-collar fathers to take leave; it appears that companies are also more interested in promoting shared parenting for this social class than for other fathers.

Gender theory would predict that progress toward full support of fathers taking parental leave will be slow, because of the gendered substructure of organizational culture (Ely & Meyerson, 2000; Swanberg, 2004). The cultures of most of these large, successful companies remain grounded in beliefs and values that reinforce the separation of work and family life and reproduce men's advantage and dominance in the labor market. Companies which espoused more caring values, traditionally associated with women and the private sphere, were more supportive of fathers' taking leave, but companies' average caring level was modest and had not changed in the thirteen years between studies. We found that when women made up a larger share of the workforce, companies were more supportive of fathers taking leave, but women's average share of the workforce had not changed between 1993 and 2006. Companies were also more supportive of fathers taking leave when they had a larger proportion of female top managers, but women's relative share of the management of these large companies, while growing, was still well below their share of the workforce. Companies that prioritized women's advancement were more likely to offer fathers' formal support programs, and these companies increased in number over time, but the majority still do not have this as a high priority. Prospects for fathers taking a more equal share of parental leave days with mothers in the near future in Sweden therefore seem slim.

Will the worsening economy stall progress even more? During the last recession, our 1993 study found that companies concerned with productivity and cost-cutting provided less formal and informal support to fathers who wanted to take parental leave. What will be the consequences of an economic recession on support for fathers' leave-taking in Sweden this time around? Perhaps companies will have to balance concerns for cost-cutting and productivity with the demands and needs of a new generation of Swedish men who have grown up with the ideals of gender equality and shared parenthood, who are likely to feel entitled to take parental leave as much as mothers. According to Lewis and Haas (2005), national social policies can affect individuals' sense of entitlement to gender equitable company policies that promote integration between paid work and family life. This sense of entitlement may over time affect workplace values and expectations, so that fatherhood may eventually become more visible in profit-seeking companies in Sweden.

References

- Acker, J. (1990). Hierarchies, jobs and bodies: A theory of gendered organizations. *Gender & Society*, 4, 139-158.
- Anxo, D., Fagan, C., & Smith, M. (2007). *Parental leave in European companies*. Dublin, IR: European Foundation for the Improvement of Living and Working Conditions. Available at <http://www.eurofound.europa.int>
- Arbetsmarknadsstyrelsen. (1977). *Equality in the labor market – Programme adopted by the Labor Market Board*. Stockholm, Sweden: Arbetsmarknadsstyrelsen.
- Bekkengen, L. (2002). *Man får vilja – Om föräldraskap och föräldraledighet i arbetsliv och familj* [One must choose – About parenthood and parental leave in working life and family life]. Malmö, Sweden: Liber.
- Burud, S., & Tumolo, M. (2004). *Leveraging the new human capital*. Palo Alto, CA: Davies-Black.
- Bygren, M., & Duvander, A-Z. (2004). Ingen annan på jobbet har ju varit pappaledig—Papporna, deras arbetsplatser och deras pappaledighuttag [No other father at this workplace has taken parental leave—Fathers, their workplaces and their use of parental leave]. In M. Bygren, M. Gähler, & M. Neramo (Eds.), *Familj och arbete* [Family and work] (pp. 166-193). Stockholm, Sweden: SNS Förlag.
- Bygren, M., & Duvander, A-Z. (2006). Parents' workplace situation and fathers' parental leave use. *Journal of Marriage and Family*, 68, 363-372.
- Dorio, J., Bryant, R., & Allen, T. (2008). Work-related outcomes of the work-family interface: Why organizations should care. In K. Korabik, D. Lero, & D. Whitehead (Eds.), *Handbook of work-family integration* (pp. 157-176). New York: Academic Press.
- Elvin-Nowak, Y. (2005). *Världens bästa pappa? Om mäns relationer och strävan efter att göra rätt* [The world's best pappa? On men's relationships and efforts to do the right thing]. Stockholm, Sweden: Albert Bonniers Förlag.
- Ely, R., & Meyerson, D. (2000). Theories of gender in organizations. *Research in Organizational Behavior*, 22, 103-151.
- European Opinion Research Group. (2004). *Europeans' attitudes to parental leave. European Commission, Standard Eurobarometer*. Brussels, Belgium: European Opinion Research Group.
- Galinsky, E., & Bond, J. (1998). *The 1998 Business Work-Life Study*. New York: Families and Work Institute.
- Goodstein, J. (1994). Institutional pressures and strategic responsiveness: Employer involvement in work-family issues. *Academy of Management Journal*, 37, 350-382.
- Haas, B. (2005). Work-care balance. *Current Sociology*, 53(5), 487-508.
- Haas, L. (1992). *Equal parenthood and social policy: A study of parental leave in Sweden*. Albany: State University of New York Press.
- Haas, L. (2003). Parental leave and gender equality: Lessons from the European Union. *Review of Policy Research*, 20, 89-114.
- Haas, L., Allard, K., & Hwang, P. (2002). The impact of organizational culture on men's use of parental leave in Sweden. *Community, Work and Family*, 5(3), 319-342.
- Haas, L., Chronholm, A., & Hwang, C.P. (2008). Sweden. In P. Moss & M. Korintus (Eds.), *International Review of Leave Policies and Related Research*. UK Department for Business Enterprise & Regulatory Reform, Employment Relations Series No. 100 (pp. 332-344). London: UK Department for Business Enterprise & Regulatory Reform.

- Haas, L., & Hwang, C. (2007). Gender and organizational culture: Correlates of company responsiveness to fathers in Sweden. *Gender & Society, 21*(1), 52-79.
- Haas, L., & Hwang, P. (1995). Company culture and men's usage of family leave benefits in Sweden. *Family Relations, 44*, 28-36.
- Højgaard, L. (1997). Working fathers. *Acta Sociologica, 40*, 245-261.
- Holter, Ø. (2007). Men's work and family reconciliation in Europe. *Men and Masculinities, 9*(4), 425-456.
- Högberg, C. (1997). Framsynta företag främjar familjen? [Progressive companies support families]. *Arbetsmiljö* [The work environment], Nr. 11 (November).
- Josefsson, J. (2007). *Uppdelning av föräldraledighet – Nöjda och missnöjda föräldrar* [Division of parental leave – Satisfied and dissatisfied parents]. *Working Papers in Social Insurance 2007:2*. Stockholm: Försäkringskassan. Retrieved from <http://forsakringskassan.se/filer/publikationer/pdf/wp0702.pdf>
- Klinth, R. (2008). The best of both worlds? Fatherhood and gender equality in Swedish paternity leave campaigns, 1976-2000. *Fathering, 6*(1), 20-38.
- Kvande, E. (2008). Embodying male workers as fathers in a flexible working life. In D. Morgan, B. Brandth, & E. Kvande (Eds.), *Gender, bodies and work* (pp. 75-87). London: Ashgate.
- Lambert, S., & Haley-Lock, A. (2004). The organizational stratification of opportunities for work-life balance. *Community, Work & Family, 7*(2), 179-195.
- Lammi-Taskula, J. (2007). *Parental leave for fathers?* Helsinki, Finland: Stakes.
- Lewis, S., & Haas, L. (2005). Work-life integration and social policy. In E. Kossek & S. Lambert (Eds.), *Work and life integration* (pp. 349-374). Mahwah, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum.
- Lundgren, F. (2006). Mer pappaledigt i högutbildade [More fathers take parental leave among the highly educated]. *Välfärd* [Social Welfare], 4, 12-13.
- Reformerad Försäkring [Reformed social insurance]. (2005). *Statens offentliga utredningar* [Official government reports] 2005:73. Stockholm: Statens Offentliga Utredningar.
- Rost, H. (1999). Fathers and parental leave in Germany. In P. Moss & F. Deven (Eds.), *Parental leave* (pp. 249-266). The Hague/Brussels: NIDI/CBGS Publications.
- Rostgaard, T., Christoffersen, M., & Weise, H. (1999). Parental leave in Denmark. In P. Moss & F. Deven (Eds.), *Parental leave* (pp. 25-44). The Hague/Brussels: NIDI/CBGS Publications.
- Russell, G., Watson, D., & Watson, J. (1988). Work/family policies, the changing role of fathers and the presumption of shared responsibility for parenting. *Australian Journal of Social Issues, 23*, 249-267.
- Smeaton, D. (2006). *Dads and their babies. Equal Opportunities Commission Working Paper Series No. 44*. Manchester, UK: Equal Opportunities Commission. Available at <http://www.eoc.org.uk/research>
- Sundström, M., & Duvander, A-Z. (2002). Gender division of childcare and sharing of parental leave among new parents in Sweden. *European Sociological Review, 18*(4), 433-447.
- Swanberg, J. (2004). Illuminating gendered organization assumptions. *Community, Work & Family, 7*(1), 3-28.
- Thompson, M., Vinter, L., & Young, V. (2005). *Dads and their babies: Leave arrangements in the first year*. Equal Opportunities Commission Working Paper Series No. 37. Manchester, UK: Equal Opportunities Commission.
- Whitehouse, G., Diamond, C., & Baird, M. (2007). Fathers' use of parental leave in Australia. *Community, Work & Family, 10*(4), 387-407.

Copyright of *Fathering: A Journal of Theory, Research, & Practice about Men as Fathers* is the property of *Men's Studies Press* and its content may not be copied or emailed to multiple sites or posted to a listserv without the copyright holder's express written permission. However, users may print, download, or email articles for individual use.