
Parents' Workplace Situation and Fathers' Parental Leave Use

This study examines how the workplace situation of both parents affects fathers' parental leave use. We used parental leave-taking register data from Statistics Sweden for dual-earner couples who resided in Stockholm and had children in 1997 (n = 3,755). The results indicate that fathers shorten their parental leave if their workplaces are such that one can expect leave to be associated with high costs and that fathers appear to be influenced by the leave use of other fathers in the workplace. Mothers' workplace situation appears to be less important for fathers' leave use. The results point to the importance of actors other than parents (such as employers) for understanding the gender-based division of child care.

Do you spend time with your family? Good.
Because a man that doesn't spend time with his family can never be a real man.

Don Corleone

In an international perspective, Swedish family policy may be seen as both gender neutral and child friendly as parental leave is directed to both mothers and fathers and as it amounts to over 1 year of leave. Thus, if a Swedish man

wants to follow the advice of Marlon Brando's film character, he certainly has ample opportunities to do so.

Although expectations concerning fatherhood in Sweden do involve more active participation compared with those of other countries (see Bergman & Hobson, 2002), both the traditional division of labor between men and women and economic incentives reinforce a skewed division of leave between parents. Parental leave may be divided according to the parents' preferences, but mothers use the large majority of parental leave days.

In this article, we argue that, in addition to individual characteristics, workplace factors are likely to be of importance to the division of parental leave. Indeed, one of the main explanations for why men do not use a larger share of the leave is that they find it difficult to be absent from their workplaces (Brandth & Kvande, 2001, 2002; Haas, Allard, & Hwang, 2002; Näsman, 1992). Earlier studies have found variation in employers' attitudes toward parental leave and that employees mention employers' attitudes as an obstacle to using parental leave (Haas & Hwang, 1995; Haas et al.). We presently know very little, however, about whether workplace factors actually influence parental leave use. To our knowledge, no large-scale studies covering all sectors of the labor market have investigated variation in leave use across workplaces. Further, much of the research has relied on self-reports of parental leave use and the reasons for it, whereas studies of actual leave taking are scarce. We extend previous

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research on the division of parental leave between parents by explicitly considering how the workplace context of both parents affects father's leave use. We next briefly describe the Swedish setting and thereafter introduce our arguments concerning influences on fathers' parental leave use. Thereafter, we describe the data and our empirical analysis of it. Finally, we draw conclusions from the analyses.

BACKGROUND

One salient feature of the Swedish labor market is the relatively large public sector. Public expenditures are 55% of gross domestic product, and the public sector employs around 35% of the labor force, typically for care and education; the largest industries in the private sector are manufacturing, financial services, and retail trade. Within-sector differences in work conditions and labor contracts are greater than between-sector differences, but jobs in the public sector tend to have lower pay. The labor market may be described as gender equal in the sense that women make up 48% of the labor force, but it is markedly gender segregated by sector, occupation, and establishment, not least reflected in the fact that women make up about two thirds of those employed in the public sector, but only about one third of those employed in the private sector (Statistics Sweden, 2004). Even if most women participate in labor market work, women still do most of the housework (Evertsson & Neramo, 2004), and men in typically female occupations often experience a career advantage (Hultin, 2003).

The Swedish parental leave policy was introduced in 1974 and replaced the maternity pay to which mothers had been entitled. It was one of the political reforms that caused the fall of the male-breadwinner model and the rise of the dual-earner model. Other important factors in this transition were the introduction of individual taxation of married couples and the expansion of public child care (Hirdman, 1998). Both ideological reasoning and a great demand for (female) labor were the driving forces behind this transformation. From the beginning, parental leave was directed at both parents to share between them as they saw fit. The benefits imply no direct cost to the employer and cover all parents permanently residing in Sweden.

The maximum length of parental leave was originally 6 months, but it was extended in steps

during the 1980s until it reached 15 months in 1989. The leave may be used until the child's eighth birthday, and the replacement rate has ranged from 75% to 90% (presently 80%) of earlier income up to a relatively high ceiling. Income over the ceiling is not replaced. Parents with no earnings before childbirth receive only a low flat rate. During the 1990s, the flat rate was equivalent to U.S. \$8 a day. The large difference in benefits depending on whether the parent worked before the child's birth implies that there is a strong incentive to postpone childbearing until young men and women are established in the labor market (Sundström & Duvander, 2002). Parental leave implies that a parent on leave does not formally have to exit the labor market as job security during leave is guaranteed. (For more details on the Parental Leave Act, see Ministry of Industry, Employment and Communications, 2001, and for details on the Family Policy, see Ministry of Health and Social Affairs, 2003.)

Fathers used a very small share (around 1%) of parental leave during the 1970s, and this share has thereafter increased slowly to 18% of the leave days in 2003. Fathers who use the leave are, on average, on leave for 1 – 2 months (Nyman & Pettersson, 2002). The skewed division between men and women has been a matter of political concern. As a result, in 1995, one month of parental leave was reserved for each parent, often referred to as the "daddy month." After introduction of this use-or-lose rule, the share of fathers who used the leave increased, but the mean number of days used by fathers decreased, perhaps because of an increase in less motivated fathers using parental leave (Nyman & Pettersson; Sundström & Duvander, 2002).

Generally and undeniably, the interests of both employer and colleagues are in conflict with parents' wishes to use parental leave. For instance, parents' absence may cause production loss, costs associated with replacements, or more work for colleagues. Negative consequences for the employer and colleagues are applicable both to mothers' and to fathers' leave use, but, as fathers' leaves are in most cases more negotiable than mothers' (Bekkengen, 2002; Brandth & Kvande, 2002), it is likely that fathers' leave use is more easily influenced than mothers' leave use by the employer. Normally, fathers choose *whether* to use the leave, and if they choose to, *when* and *how long*, whereas mothers only choose *how long* their leave will be (Bekkengen).

Because there is a fixed number of parental leave benefit days, the father's parental leave taking is affected by the mother's and vice versa. In one sense, the characteristics of the mother and the father as well as of their workplaces indicate what costs and benefits parental leave use implies for mothers and fathers. From the father's perspective, the length of his parental leave may be seen as the outcome of two bargaining and adjustment processes, one between him and the mother and one between him and his workplace (Sundström & Duvander, 2002).

What influences from the workplace can then be expected? Generally, one would expect fathers' parental leave use to decrease with costs (economic and noneconomic) they and their employers face when they are on parental leave and to increase with costs the mother and her employer face. We have formulated four hypotheses concerning how characteristics of the father's workplace and four hypotheses concerning how characteristics of the mother's workplace may affect the length of the father's parental leave.

Depending on how common long absences are at the workplace, routines for handling them also will be established to a varying degree. Routines and experience with absence will facilitate leave use and thus enable parents, especially fathers, to use leave. The employer at female-dominated workplaces may be more used to absences caused by parental leave and the attitudes toward parental leave may also be more positive. We hypothesize that a father's length of leave increases with the representation of women in his workplace.

As the public sector is not driven by profit, employee absences that cause production loss, delays, or modified or restricted activities will not threaten the enterprise to the same extent as in profit-driven businesses. Thus, we hypothesize that a father's length of leave is longer if his workplace is in the public sector.

Workplaces also may be more or less vulnerable to particular employees' absences, especially because leave may be more easily arranged at large workplaces as a replacement may be easier to find. Therefore, we hypothesize that a father's length of leave increases with the size of his workplace.

It is further likely that different norms for the length of an acceptable leave have been established at different workplaces, especially as the

workplace is affected by a leave. This norm will be dependent on how common it is for employees to use parental leave, and it is likely to differ for men's and women's parental leave use at the same workplace. There are probably negative sanctions against more use than is common, coming both from the employer and from the colleagues. We thus hypothesize that a father's length of leave increases with the previous length of leave of other men employed in his workplace.

We also expect fathers' leave use to increase with costs the child's mother faces while on parental leave. A cost for the mother to use leave should mean that she will be more reluctant to use a long leave, and this entails a pressure on or opportunity for the father to use more leave. Along the same line of reasoning as above, the acceptance of mothers taking long parental leaves is likely to be lower at male-dominated workplaces. We thus hypothesize that a father's length of leave increases with the representation of men in the mother's workplace. As is the case for fathers, the mothers' parental leave should also be more threatening to a private enterprise compared to a workplace in the public sector. Therefore, we hypothesize that a father's length of leave is longer if the mother's workplace belongs to the private sector. It is also likely that the mother is harder to replace in a small workplace and that she therefore is more reluctant to use a long leave. We therefore hypothesize that a father's length of leave increases the smaller the size of the mother's workplace. Furthermore, mothers who work at workplaces where it is common for fathers to use parental leave may be affected by the general workplace norm and thus may be more inclined to "let" the father use a longer parental leave. We therefore hypothesize that a father's length of leave increases with the length of leave of men employed in the mother's workplace.

Aside from the processes outlined above, it is also possible that certain employees seek out certain kinds of employers. Men who are interested in the possibility of using parental leave and also of having other kinds of flexibility in relation to family life (e.g., flexible working hours), are likely to search for jobs at workplaces where this is possible. Men who are more inclined to use parental leave may also unintentionally self-select into certain workplaces. For example, men in "female" occupations have

been found to take longer parental leaves than do other men (National Social Insurance Board, 1993). Because occupations cluster in different workplaces, as a consequence we would expect differences across workplaces in fathers' average leave use to evolve. The variation in fathers' length of leave across workplaces may thus originate from stable values and preferences among individual employees, and may not only be initiated at the workplace. Because of data constraints, we are not able to differentiate between such selection effects and causal effects originating from processes at the workplace. We thus caution against any strong causal interpretations of the relationships between workplace-level variables and fathers' parental leave use.

In the empirical analysis, we control for a number of factors that in earlier studies have been found to be important for fathers' use of parental leave. Fathers' leave use has been found to increase with income, up to the ceiling of the insurance, most probably because the replacement is zero for income exceeding it (Nyman & Pettersson, 2002; Sundström & Duvander, 2002). We also control for mother's income, which has been found to have a positive effect on the father's share of the leave, probably as mothers with high earnings are inclined to return to work earlier (Sundström & Duvander). To take nonlinear relationships into account, we include income and squared income in the estimations. We further control for the fathers' and mothers' educational levels, which have been found to have positive associations with a more gender-equal division of parental leave (Haas, 1992; Hoem, 1995; Nyman & Pettersson; Sundström & Duvander). We also control for parents' age, which has been found to be associated with fathers' leave use (Sundström & Duvander) and workplace seniority, which indicates how much organization-specific human capital they have accumulated, and to some extent can be seen as an indicator of their negotiation power vis-à-vis the employer. Earlier studies also have found that the father's share of parental leave is greater when parents are married (Sundström & Duvander), but we are not able to control for this factor. Our judgment is that this will not greatly influence the results as this variable is not likely to be correlated with the workplace factors of interest in this study. Earlier studies have also found that fathers take longer leave with the first-born

child compared to second or higher-order children (Hoem; Nyman & Pettersson; Sundström & Duvander). As we only investigate leave use after first births, one should keep in mind that fathers' leave use may be somewhat higher in this study.

METHOD

To test our hypotheses, we used a subset of the so-called LOUISE database, which was compiled from several registers by Statistics Sweden to simplify the use of these data in labor market research. For more information about this dataset, see Statistics Sweden (2002). Our subset comprises all individuals who at any time during the period 1990 – 1999 resided in Stockholm County (Stockholms län). Among other things, information on labor market status, workplace affiliation, education, household composition, yearly earnings, and yearly benefits from parental leave are included for every individual. Stockholm County had (in 1999) a population of 1.8 million, which was about one fifth of the Swedish population. Compared to Sweden, Stockholm has an overrepresentation of immigrants, university graduates, and high-income earners. The extent to which men in Stockholm use their parental leave, however, is very close to the national average (National Social Insurance Board, 1996).

From all residents of Stockholm County, a sample of 10,042 men was selected who fulfilled the selection criteria of being first-time fathers in 1997. To enable our empirical analysis, we had to make some additional selections. For these men and their partners, we needed information on individual-level variables such as income and education, as well as workplace-level information on the previous parental leave taking of men, the percentage of women among all employed, and so on. A condition for inclusion in the subsample is therefore that both the father and the mother were employed and had a workplace affiliation in any of the years 1997 – 1999 (when we measure parental leave taking). Furthermore, to calculate previous parental leave taking of fathers, at least one man who was employed in their workplace had to be the father of a small child during the period 1990 – 1996. This criterion excluded many individuals employed in workplaces with few employees and quite a few women who worked at workplaces with few men. For 3,755 fathers

(and the same number of mothers), we had information on all variables necessary for the analysis, and they therefore constitute our final sample (see Table 1 for more details). As we analyze the effect of workplace factors on the division of parental leave, we restrict our sample to couples in which both the mother and the father are employed (although not always full time) and thus can be connected to a workplace. It is, thus, a selected sample of dual-earner parents with a relatively stable attachment to the labor market. About as many fathers as mothers did not have any employment.

Dependent Variable

The dependent variable is a measure of the length of the father's parental leave during 1997 – 1999 and is calculated from yearly information on earnings and parental leave benefits. The parental leave benefit amounted to 75% of previous earnings in 1997 and 80% of previous earnings during 1998 – 1999. It is thus possible to calculate the length of parental leave, in days, for a particular father during the 2 – 3 years following childbirth, accordingly:

$$\text{Parental leave} = \begin{cases} 365 \sum_{j=1997}^{1999} \frac{B_j}{I_j + \frac{B_j}{pct_j}} & \text{if } \left(I_j + \frac{B_j}{pct_j} \right) \leq c_j \\ 365 \sum_{j=1997}^{1999} \frac{B_j}{c_j} & \text{if } \left(I_j + \frac{B_j}{pct_j} \right) > c_j \end{cases}$$

where B_j is parental leave benefits paid to the father year j and I_j is earned income for the

father year j . B_j is divided by the replacement level during the year, pct_j to get the income during the parental leave had he been working. It is necessary to make separate calculations for men who had earnings above the ceiling, c_j , to avoid underestimating their parental leave length. The ceiling was SEK 272,250 in 1997 and SEK 273,000 (approximately U.S. \$40,000) for the years 1998 – 1999. This calculation gives us a figure for parental leave use during the first 2 – 3 years following childbirth. The largest part of fathers' share of parental leave is usually taken during the child's second year, although parental leave may be used up until the child's eighth birthday. Thus, we do not estimate the complete length of parental leave for fathers, but the father's share during the first, and normally major, period of parental leave. This restriction means that the measure includes child care in which fathers are the sole caregivers, whereas later parental leave use may also include less intensive child care in which another caregiver (i.e., the mother) is also present.

Independent Variables

We measured *education* in years of formal education. As a measure of income, we used the individual's *earned income* from work in the year before they had a child (1996). In this way, we avoided conflating this measure with the dependent variable, which by definition is correlated with income following the child's birth. We used a continuous measure of income, where a unit change is equal to SEK 10,000, and squared terms in the regressions to allow for nonlinearities. A small number of individuals with extreme (high) incomes were coded to have SEK 600,000 in yearly income. We measured *seniority* at the workplace in years since

Table 1. Sample Selection Criteria

Selection Criteria	n	%
First-time fathers in 1997 residing in Stockholm County	10,042	100.0
Fathers who had a workplace affiliation in any year, 1997 – 1999	9,138	91.0
Fathers who worked at workplaces where an employed man was the father of a small child, 1990 – 1996	6,897	68.7
Fathers who were living with the mother of their child in 1998	5,816	57.9
Fathers whose partners had a workplace affiliation in any year, 1997 – 1999	4,930	49.1
Fathers whose partners worked at workplaces where an employed man was the father of a small child, 1990 – 1996	3,894	38.8
Complete information on all other variables for the father and mother was available	3,755	37.4

1990 because this is the year our data series begins. The distribution of this variable, with very few individuals having seniority extending beyond a couple of years, suggests that this truncation is not problematic. We also included the *age* of the individual in 1997 in years.

We categorized the *sector affiliation* of the workplace using the dichotomy, private-public. We used a continuous measure of the *percentage women at the workplace*, ranging between 0 and 1. We defined *workplace size* as the natural logarithm of the number of employees employed at the workplace. We measured *earlier parental leave taking of fathers at the workplace* in the same way as the dependent variable but for all men who were fathers of small children during the period 1990 – 1996. For each workplace during 1990 – 1996, we computed the average number of days of parental leave per year for those who were fathers of children below or equal to the age of 4 years. Because our final sample consists of first-time fathers in 1997, we avoid the possibility of capturing correlations between the same father's parental leave for children of different birth order. The means and proportions of all the variables are presented in Table 2.

Analytical Approach

With 18% of the observations left censored at parental leave = 0, we estimated tobit regression models to test the relationship between the fathers' parental leave use and the independent variables. We also estimated an Ordinary Least Squares model, a multinomial logit model, and an ordered logit model (the latter two with a tri-

chotomized dependent variable) to check the robustness of the results. The results of these additional regressions were very similar to those reported below. We also used fathers' share of the parental leave as a dependent variable, which gave very similar results to those presented below. To make interpretation and estimation straightforward, we used as a dependent variable the fathers' leave length in days.

Because this is a total sample of couples fulfilling our selection criteria (see Table 1), the results may be seen as factual for the Stockholm area during the time of the study, but generalizations beyond this context are only justified on analytical grounds. Because this is not a random sample, it is less appropriate to interpret the significance tests of the coefficients as indicating the probability of statistical correlations given a null correlation in the population. The data set has the same number of observations as the population, and as the significance tests use estimated standard errors identical to population standard deviations, it is more appropriate to view these tests as indicators of the robustness of the coefficients.

RESULTS

In Table 3, estimates from bivariate tobit regressions (Column 1) and two multivariate tobit regressions (Columns 2 and 3) are presented. We present marginal effects when all other independent variables are held at their means. A coefficient should be interpreted as the expected change in the fathers' parental leave, in days, for a one-unit increase in the independent variable.

Table 2. Means and Standard Deviations of the Variables (N = 3,755)

Variables	Fathers		Mothers	
	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>
Parental leave taking (days)	50.14	67.77	—	—
Fathers' earlier parental leave taking at the workplace	6.84	12.66	7.43	14.23
Women at the workplace (%)	0.36	0.22	0.59	0.22
Private sector	0.77	0.42	0.59	0.49
Log size of workplace	4.53	1.94	4.81	1.89
Seniority (years)	2.82	2.60	2.69	2.34
Education (years)	13.20	2.87	13.26	2.73
Age (years)	32.48	4.86	30.81	4.41
Earned income (in SEK/100,000)	2.21	1.24	1.75	0.93

Table 3. Marginal Effects Tobit Estimates of First-Time Fathers' Parental Leave Length in Days on Fathers' and Mothers' Individual and Workplace Characteristics (N = 3,755)

Variables	Bivariate	Multivariate	
Father works in the private sector	-14.37***	-6.80**	-6.93**
Percentage women in father's workplace	15.48***	6.05	6.26
Size of father's workplace	2.74***	1.59**	1.63**
Earlier parental leave taking of fathers in his workplace (a)	0.17*	0.14*	0.01
Mother works in the private sector	-4.68*	-1.78	-1.78
Percentage women in mother's workplace	-11.17**	-15.46**	-14.93**
Size of mother's workplace	1.16*	0.37	0.43
Earlier parental leave taking of fathers in her workplace (b)	0.08	0.07	-0.03
Interaction term a × b (/100)			1.38**
His age, years	0.34	0.15	0.14
His seniority, years	0.38	0.59	0.61
His education, years	1.23***	0.04	0.06
His earned income	1.05***	1.05***	1.05***
His earned income squared (/10)	-0.26***	-0.30***	-0.31***
Her age, years	0.45*	0.28	0.26
Her seniority, years	-1.13**	-1.07*	-1.05*
Her education, years	2.41***	2.20***	2.17***
Her earned income	-0.84**	-1.08***	-1.06***
Her earned income squared (/10)	0.24***	0.27***	0.27***
Constant		-5.50	-5.00
Likelihood ratio χ^2		214.64***	224.32***

Note: Marginal effects when all other independent variables are held at their means. Fathers with 0 days of parental leave are included as 0's in the calculations of the effects (cf. Long, 1997, pp. 209 – 210). Marginal effects on the latent variable (y*) are approximately 40% larger than those reported.

*p < .05. **p < .01. ***p < .001.

The hypothesis proposing that fathers working in the public sector will use more parental leave is tested by the dichotomous variable indicating whether the father's workplace belonged to the private or public sector. Fathers working at workplaces belonging to the private sector use less parental leave, both in the bivariate and in the multivariate analyses. In the bivariate analysis, the expected difference between private and public employees is 14 days of parental leave, and in the multivariate analyses, it is 7 days. The hypothesis is thus supported. Fathers working in female-dominated workplaces have a greater propensity to use parental leave, as indicated by the bivariate analysis. This effect is weaker, however, and nonsignificant in the multivariate analysis. Additional analyses (not presented) showed that the change in the association is a consequence of the fact that female-dominated workplaces are often large and more common in the public sector. The hypothesis is therefore not supported. We also find that men employed in larger workplaces use

more parental leave. Although the coefficient decreases in size in the multivariate analysis, it remains statistically significant. For a one-unit increase in the logarithm of the number of employees in the workplace, the expected number of fathers' parental leave increase by 1.6 days. Furthermore, the hypothesis suggesting that earlier parental leave use at the workplace will increase the father's propensity to use parental leave is also supported, although the effect is modest. For a 10-day increase in the average number of parental leave days previously used by fathers in the workplace, the expected number of fathers' parental leave increase by 1.7 days. We thus largely find the expected effects of fathers' workplaces on their parental leave use.

We also hypothesized that characteristics of the mother's workplace will correlate with the division of parental leave, mainly, in the opposite directions compared to the father's workplace, the rationale being that her costs of absence will influence her willingness to share leave with the father. If her costs of leave at the

workplace are high, the father's parental leave use should be positively influenced. We therefore test whether the mother's employment in the private sector will cause the father to use more parental leave as her costs of absence in these cases may be higher than if she were employed in the public sector. This hypothesis receives no support. Nevertheless, if the mother works in a female-dominated workplace, the father has a lower propensity to use parental leave. In these cases, the mother may have a low cost of using the leave. In the hypothetical case of comparing a mother working in an all-male workplace with a mother working in an all-female workplace, the latter's spouse would be expected to use 15 fewer days of parental leave compared to the former's spouse. Regarding the size of the mother's workplace, our expectation was that the father would have a higher propensity to use parental leave if the mother worked at a workplace with few employees as her absence then would be more costly. The bivariate analysis shows an effect in the other direction, however, and the multivariate analysis shows that there is a nonsignificant association between the size of the mother's workplace and father's parental leave use. Furthermore, there seems to be no substantial association between earlier parental leave use of fathers at the mother's workplace and fathers' parental leave taking.

As we were interested in how the combinations of factors may influence how the leave is divided, we also tested interactions between the mother's and the father's workplace factors. With one exception, none of the interaction tests indicated a nonadditive association between the mother's and the father's workplace factors and the father's parental leave use. The exception is reported in the third column in Table 3. With an interaction term between fathers' earlier leave use at the mother's and the father's respective workplaces, we find that it is the combination of the mother's and father's workplaces that seems to be important. If both the mother and the father work at workplaces where fathers' earlier parental leave use is high, compared with cases where just one of the parents work at this kind of workplace, then the father will use parental leave to a much greater extent.

In general, we find less support for the hypotheses that the mother's workplace influences father's parental leave use than for the hypotheses that the father's workplace influen-

ces his leave use. Last, we find that the background variables show the expected patterns or no effects. Fathers' leave use increases with income up to a certain level, after which it decreases. The regression curve has its maximum at a yearly income of SEK 172,000. Interestingly, we find a mirror effect of the mother's income. A father's length of leave decreases with the child's mother's income, until her income reach about SEK 200,000, after which it instead increases. Moreover, we find that father's education has no association but that there is a positive association between mother's education and father's parental leave length. There is also a negative association between her seniority at the workplace and the outcome, indicating that the longer her seniority, the shorter his parental leave.

CONCLUSION

Fathers working in the private sector, at small workplaces, and in male-dominated workplaces, are less likely to use parental leave. Men who work at workplaces where other fathers have not previously used a great deal of parental leave are also less likely to use it. We conclude that father's parental leave use varies depending on the characteristics of his workplace. This may be a causal effect implying that fathers choose to limit their parental leave taking if they are likely to face costs associated with leave taking at their workplace. We cannot rule out the possibility of a selection effect, however, in that fathers who want to use parental leave may be self-selected into certain workplaces.

Regarding relationships between characteristics of mothers' workplaces and fathers' parental leave, we found less covariation. The only strong association was that if the mother is working in a female-dominated workplace, then the father uses less parental leave. This may be because her costs of absence are low in these workplaces. Women at male-dominated workplaces may be called into question if they take a long parental leave, and they may thus have difficulties sustaining their work position.

Both men and women seem to be influenced by the earlier parental leave taking of men in their respective workplaces, provided that leave taking was similar in the other parent's workplace. It seems that the influence of other fathers in the parents' respective workplaces has to be confirmed by the other parent's workplace

situation in order to affect the decision of how to divide the leave between them. This underlines the complexities of the contextual nature of the parental leave decision.

The conclusions we are able to draw from these results are limited by our restricted knowledge of the workplaces. For instance, information on the flexibility of work hours and work schedules would give us a deeper understanding of obstacles to fathers' leave use. If we knew the occupational prestige, or class, of the fathers and mothers, we would also be able to better describe the interplay between work and family for individuals at different levels in the occupational hierarchy and whether it can account for some of the associations found here (e.g., workplace gender composition and workplace sector). Furthermore, we would like to know more about male employees who were on parental leave, especially their relationship to other fathers in their workplaces. Fathers considering parental leave may be influenced not only by colleagues in the closest work environment but also by superiors in influential positions. A more detailed analysis of workplace-specific networks and hierarchies would provide a more nuanced picture of what matters for the diffusion of parental leave use patterns at the workplace.

Because we use Swedish data, there are also limits on the generalizability of the results. On the one hand, choices of how to take care of children reflect phenomena that are almost universal in modern societies: the balance between paid work and family and the division of labor in couples. On the other hand, parental leave insurance is highly specific to the Swedish (Nordic) welfare state context, where the norm, in contrast to many other countries, is that fathers should be directly involved in the care of their children (Bergman & Hobson, 2002). This implies that the trade-off between work and family is probably more manifest for Swedish fathers, compared with fathers in other countries. One consequence of this may be that workplace factors in Sweden are more strongly connected to fathers' involvement in the care of children, which is why the effects we estimate here may be larger than in most other countries.

The gender aspect of who has predominance in deciding how the leave is to be divided should not be neglected: Women often have the final say on how parental leave should be divided in couples (Berggren & Duvander, 2003). This predominance is reinforced by gen-

der differences in the labor market situation. Relative to men, women have been found to have little to lose by taking a long parental leave (Albrecht, Edin, Sundström, & Vroman, 1999). Therefore, it is understandable that the father's workplace situation more than the mother's workplace situation influences the decision on how to divide the leave. Another reason that fathers' workplaces matter more than mothers' is the prevalent gender difference in the level of leave use. Fathers use, on average, around 1 – 2 months of leave, whereas mothers use around 1 year of leave. The marginal cost of another month of leave is arguably much greater at low levels of leave use than at high levels of leave use. Thus, the division of parental leave is not a gender-neutral question. Because of the initially skewed division of parental leave, the workplace and individual factors influence the division of parental leave in gender-typical ways.

Can the results from this study on parental leave during a child's first years be generalized to the division of child care in a broader sense? The gender-based division of child care is probably less skewed than is the gender-based division of parental leave (cf. Sayer, Bianchi, & Robinson, 2004). The trade-off between work and child care, however, is not as straightforward as the trade-off between work and parental leave, is probably an ever-present element in most modern families, and even more so in countries with a high female labor force participation rate, such as Sweden. Our belief is that these results do apply more generally, in that actors other than parents, such as employers, are important for understanding the gender-based division of child care. Due consideration of the labor market situation of mothers, but perhaps even more so the labor market situation of fathers, is needed to properly understand the processes underlying this division. There is obviously more to the trade-off between work and child care than just individual mothers and their labor market situation, and future research on the gender-based division of child care would benefit from a focus on other relevant actors in this context, that is, fathers and the employers of mothers and fathers.

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