



Parental Leave and Changes in Gendered Practices

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Iceland

- Inhabitants, 329.000 – around 80% live in the capital area – ethnically homogeneous
- Fairly peaceful society
- – no domestic army – 0-2 murders a year
- – 1.5% of women suffer violence in close relationship each year
- Fairly gender equal
- – no. 1 on World Economic Forum Gender Gap list for 7 consecutive years



Main components in the law on parental leave from 2000

- Parental leave extended from 6 to 9 months, to be used within 18 months
- From a low, flat rate, economic compensation to 80% of salary
- Protection of employment
- Accumulation of social rights
- Three months for the mother, three for the father and three that can be shared
- Financed by insurance levy, paid by employers



Main arguments

- Traditional division of labour between mothers and fathers has often resulted in the **father being deprived of opportunities** to be with his child
- **Research** in both Iceland and other countries has shown that fathers **want to spend more time** with their children
- Equal participation of parents in the labour market calls for equal rights when it comes to **balancing family and work responsibilities**



Social unity

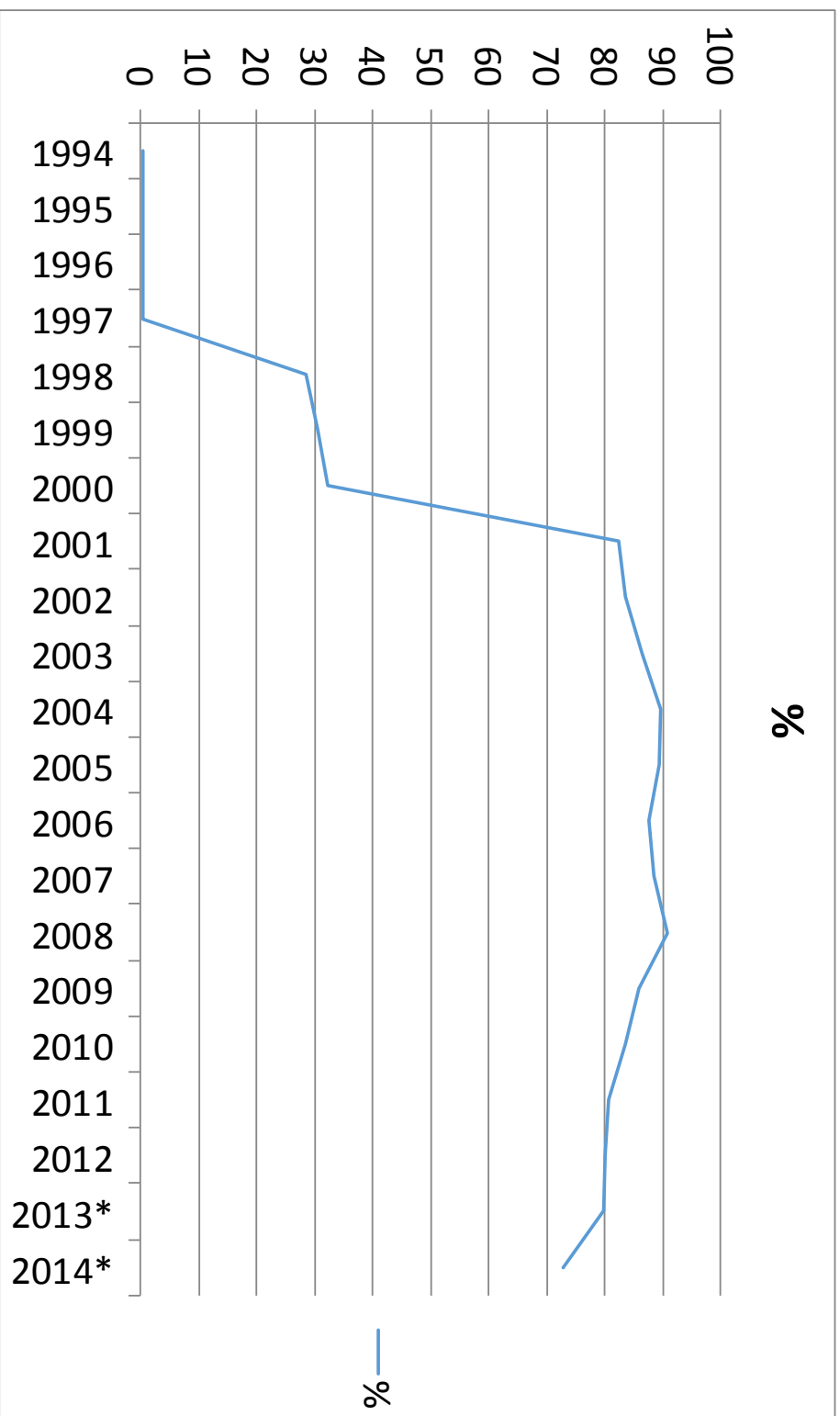
- Introduced by a centre-right government
- Adopted unanimously in parliament (Alþingi)
- No real protests (a few neo-liberals)
- Gallup 2003/2012: 85.4% - 88.6% say that it is positive that men use their right to 3 – 6 months paternity leave. Women are more positive than men, younger people are more positive than older, 73.7% - 81% of employers are positive



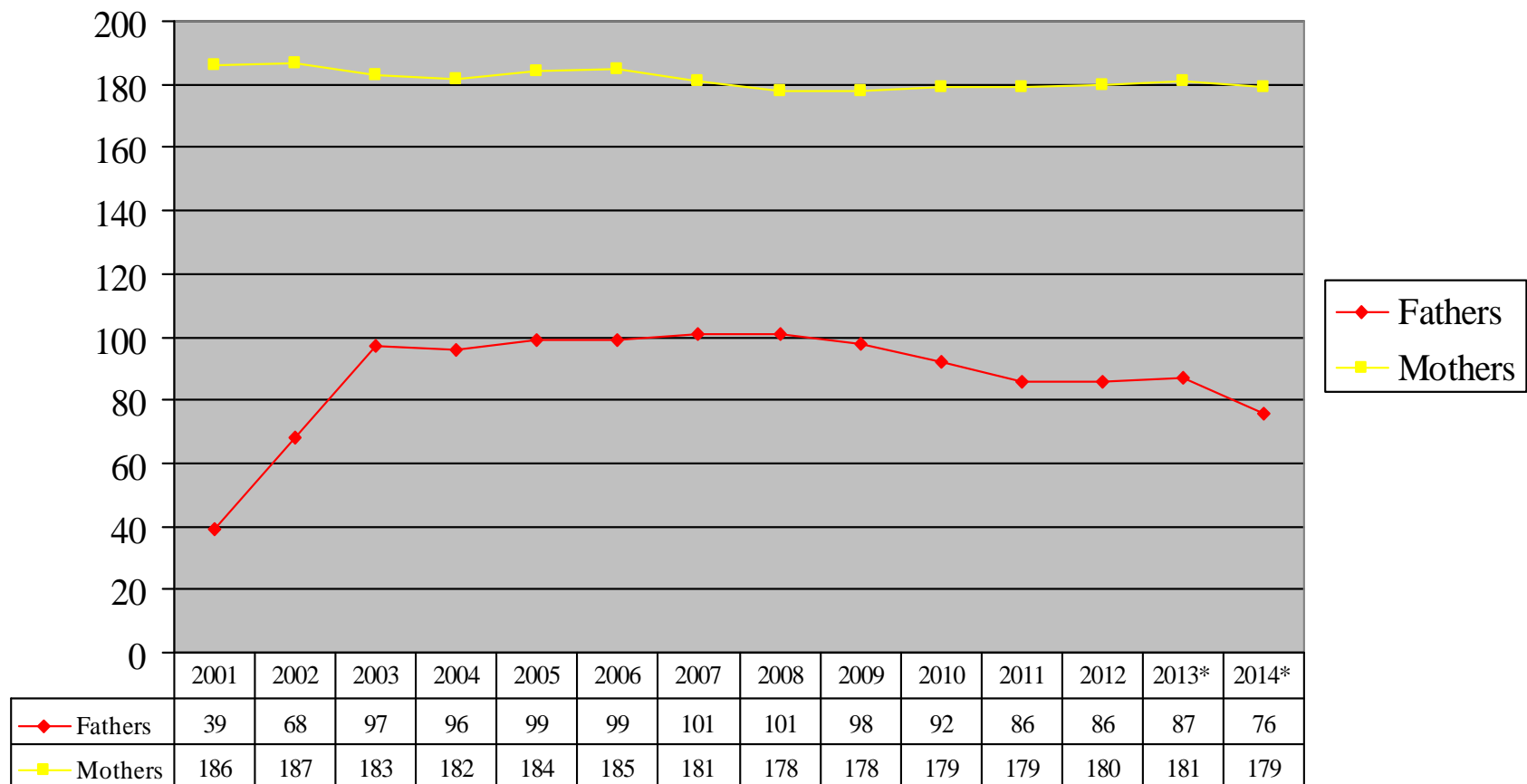
Parental leave and austerity measures

- A very high ceiling on compensation was introduced in 2004, affecting 2.6% of fathers and 0.4% of mothers
- Severe economic crisis in autumn 2008
- In 2008-2009 the ceiling was lowered three times and now affects 45.7% of fathers and 19% of mothers

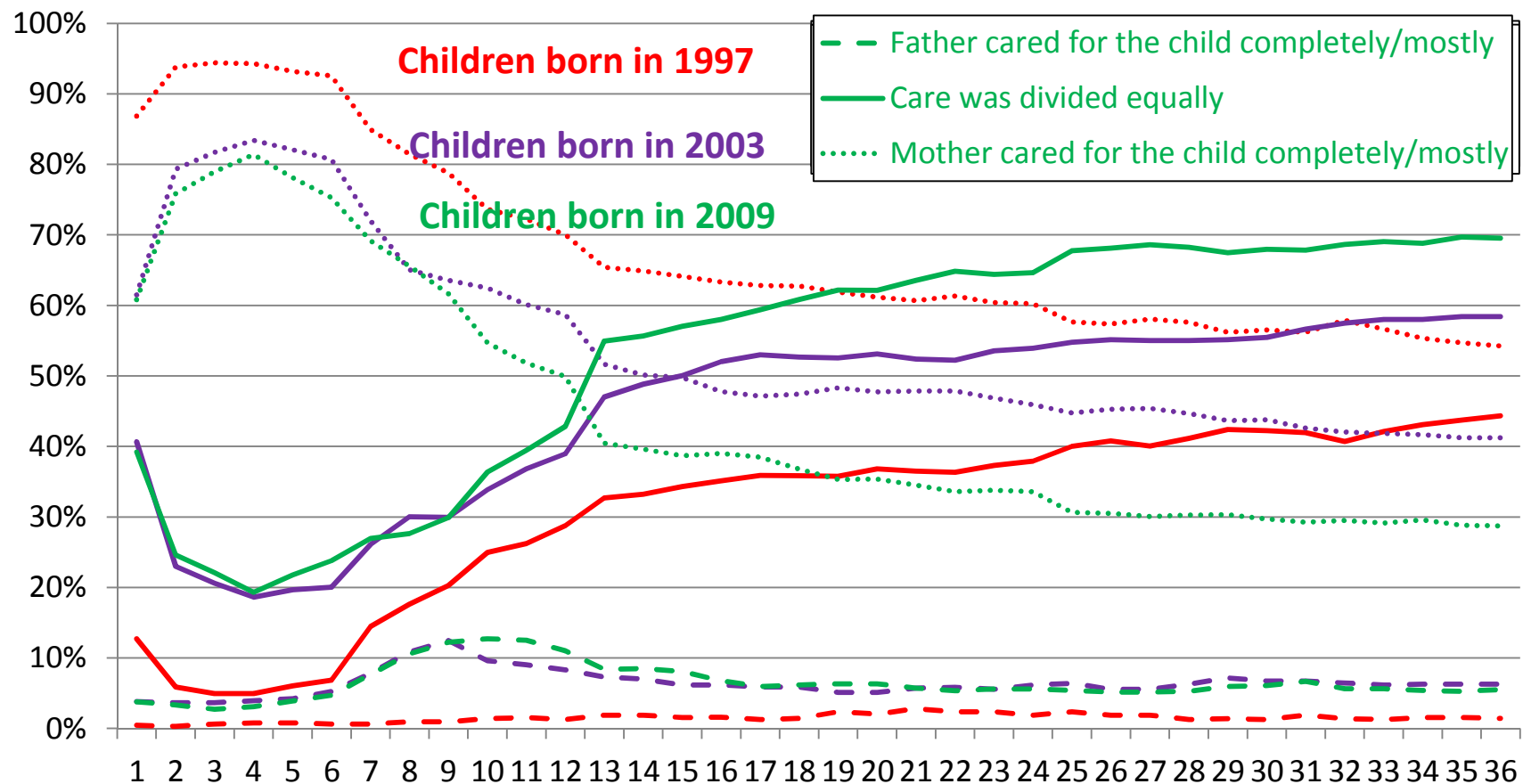
Icelandic fathers on parental leave (* = preliminary figures)



Average number of days used (* = preliminary figures)



How did cohabiting and married parents divide care during the day?



Arnalds, Eydal and Gíslason, 2015





Length matters

The longer that fathers have been on leave, the more they are likely to say that is has increased: Their understanding of a child's needs; their enjoyment in taking care of a child; their emotional attachment to the child; their understanding of how much work it is to care for a child; their participation in child care after the leave is over

(Auður Arna Arnardóttir 2008)



A father in 2008

- “We don’t seem to have any attitude problem here, that people look down on men on parental leave, I think it is quite the opposite. Now you are regarded as weird if you don’t use the paternity leave.”
- (Equal Rights to Earn and Care)



An employer

- “We just discuss it, how do you want to take the leave? How long are you going to take. Some want to be away for a whole year and we have accepted that... If someone wanted to be on leave one week and work the next and so on then it would be difficult for me to solve that. But of course everything is possible.”
- (Equal Rights to Earn and Care)

Experienced attitudes to leave taking in workplaces

(Bryndís Jónsdóttir 2007)

	Attitudes of co-workers		Attitudes of employers	
	Positive	Negative	Positive	Negative
Fathers	84.0%	3.2%	73.1%	10.9%
Mothers	92.9%	1.4%	86.4%	4.8%



A father after three months on leave

- “I never experienced that this was something out of the ordinary. My friends and relatives were all with me in this, thought it was natural and fine... It’s just... this seems to be the view, at least with this generation, that this is natural and maybe some think that it is... yes it is more that people talk about this as a privilege... you know, to be able to do this and maybe there’s some envy connected to that, but I’ve never experienced any negativity or that this was something I should not do.”



Success?

- Mothers return to work sooner after giving birth
- They reach similar levels of working hours sooner
- Fathers have reduced their working hours
- Fathers are much more active in taking care of their children during and after parental leave
- Young men incorporate caring fatherhood in to their images of masculinity



Success?

- The WHO-study “Health Behaviour of Schoolage Children” shows that of all the 43 countries participating the highest percentage of Icelandic children (11, 13 and 15 years old) find it easy or very easy to talk to their fathers. These are the first cohorts to have benefitted from the new law on parental leave.



Necessary conditions

- Economic compensation related to salary
- Non-transferable rights
- Flexibility
- Solid institutional support



Thank you

