



***“PACTAR EL FUTURO.
Debate para un nuevo consenso en torno al bienestar”.***

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**LA CONCILIACIÓN DE LA VIDA FAMILIAR Y
LABORAL, ¿ES UN ASUNTO DE HOMBRES? RETOS Y
DESAFÍOS DE HOMBRES TRABAJADORES
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1.1. Género y Políticas Públicas: Retos y Desafíos

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Work-Life Balance: Does it matter for men? Challenges for working fathers

Resumen/Abstract

Based on three discussion groups conducted in Barcelona, Madrid and Seville in 2016 and on recent statistical data, this paper explores the barriers and possibilities that involved fathers encounter at their workplaces when they enter parenthood. Involved fathers are defined as those who adapt their working time, work schedule or workplace to parenting, or those who have a job that allows for work-life balance. In addition, they form dual-earner couples with a full-time working partner and spend at least two hours at weekdays caring for their children. Fathers from public sector enterprises, medium to large private companies and small businesses participated in one discussion group respectively.

This qualitative and quantitative analysis shows that working in tight shifts (mornings mainly), as well as schedule flexibility, telework and paid paternity leaves are the measures mostly used by the interviewed fathers, and by Spanish fathers in general. In addition, the use of schedule flexibility and telework display very low gender gaps in contrast to opting for unpaid and transferable leaves or the use of statutory entitlement to reduced workhours. Under certain circumstances supervisors and coworkers attitudes are described as hostile to the adoption of support measures. Some clear policy recommendations arise from this study, should the aim be to foster work-life balance for fathers and mothers but without having unintended consequences on gender inequality.

Palabras clave/keywords: fatherhood, employments, cares, enterprises, qualitative method.

Introduction

Feminist research and studies on work-life balance have analyzed for long how gender as a social structure (Risman and Davis, 2013) generates and reproduces a social stratification where women occupy positions with less power, recognition and fewer rewards compared to men. The private and intimate sphere is one of the loci where the subordination of female to male interests is constantly reproduced, because male privileges are taken as a given or accepted as the price to pay for arranging family life in practical and harmonious ways. We acknowledge the power of the theoretical perspective of gender as social structure and focus on male subjects who are changing their gender relations within the family and at their workplace. The focus here is on men in dual-earner couples, who display a non-traditional family role, because they share childcare with their female partner to a larger extent than average men (Pleck and Masciadrelli, 2004). By doing so they recognize care as part of their parental responsibility, value the employment and time of their female partners as equally or even more important than theirs, and partially give up the male privilege of putting the job first. Although a minority, they show ways to undo gender in care and housework (Domínguez-Folgueras et al., 2016) and they may also constitute new role models of

“enriched” workers in workplaces. Fathers able to adapt their job to work-life balance are forerunners of the new paradigm of enrichment for enterprises through employees’ family involvement (Greenhaus and Powell, 2006).

According to our previous research with 57 Spanish first-time couples, involved fathers often have chosen jobs in family-friendly enterprises or made some work adaptations, reduced work hours, changed schedule, asked for teleworking, etc. (Abril et al., 2015). Adaptations or family-friendly enterprises are described by them as a basic condition to get involved in childcare in ways similar to those of their female partners. Family-friendly workplaces have been described in a recent research as those offering work-family support, schedule control for employees, and family supportive supervisors (Kelly and Moen, 2007; Kossek et al., 2011). Until now, most Spanish research on family-friendly enterprises was based on surveys conducted with Human Resources staff and managers (Poelmans et al., 2003; Alegre et al., 2007; López-Ibor et al., 2010; Fundación Más Familia, 2015) with trade-unions /workers’ councils representatives (Merino and Gosálbez, 2016) or resorted to collective agreements as a basis for the study (De la Fuente, 1998; Serrano, 2010). Yet, we know that formal policy measures at enterprises are only a first step, which has to be embedded into a family-friendly and gender egalitarian culture.

This paper explores the characteristics of family-friendly workplaces from the point of view of involved fathers. Based on three discussion groups¹ conducted in Barcelona, Madrid and Seville in 2016, this study explores the barriers, possibilities and penalizations that the fathers involved perceive at their workplaces. In this analysis, involved fathers are those who adapted their working time, work schedule or workplace to parenting needs or those having jobs that facilitate work-family balance. In addition, they are partnered with a full-time working mother and spend at least two hours at weekdays caring for their children. By law, in Spain parents have the possibility to reduce their work hours until their youngest child is 12 years old, which leads us to discussion on men who are fathers of at least one child up to this age. One discussion group recruited fathers from public sector enterprises in Madrid, another from medium to large private enterprises in Barcelona and the third from small businesses in Seville. The literature on work-life conflict and survey data show that work conditions and conflicts vary importantly across these three types of enterprises (Alegre et al., 2007; European Commission, 2014, p. 44). The concrete aim of the discussion groups was to explore how involved fathers perceive the problems and possibilities to balance work and family in their respective workplaces, as well as their fatherhood practices. We spoke with them about the measures for work-life balance they use and about formal, informal and personal support by supervisors and work colleagues.

¹ In the methodology section, we explain the characteristics of this qualitative research technique, whose dynamic is very different from the Anglo-Saxon focus groups.

In this paper, we analyze the discourses of the fathers, place them into the Spanish labour market context and interpret them from the perspective of undoing gender on the job. What meanings do these fathers attach to fatherhood and how do they evaluate different formal and informal possibilities to adapt working conditions to their personal and family needs. This study divides into four parts. First, we describe the recruitment procedure and the particularities of the sample. Second, we present the father's discourses on how fatherhood has changed their lives and their relation to work. Third, fathers' discourses on the use of three formal work adaptations are analyzed from a gender perspective. Finally, we conclude about how some informal job features that support fathers' involvement in childcare and why other job characteristics generate a gender bias in work-life conciliation.

Research Context

Fathers involvement in childcare depends on individual, couple-level and contextual factors. Roughly summarized, fathers need to be willing to take up a substantial part of the care work that a child needs. Then, his partner has to share this aim and have difficulties to take over all the care work, as traditionally assumed for mothers. Third, the father's work situation has to be or become suitable to allow him to have time to invest in childcare. Thus, individual attitudes and time-availability together with relative resources within the couple influence father's involvement. Men choose workplaces, but these also influence their attitudes, time availability and resources for implicit and explicit bargaining within the couple. This study is based on previous research on fathers involvement in childcare and on studies about work-life balance, work-family conflict and family-work enrichment.

There is a large tradition of research about the characteristics of family-friendly enterprises and propositions on the most important workplace features to reduce work-family conflict and facilitate work-life balance. A meta-analysis on general and work-family-specific supervisor and organizational support and work-family conflict conducted by Kossek et al. (2011) shows that positive perceptions of work-family organizational support and work-family supervisor support reduce work-life conflict. The authors recognize that other non-measured factors may also alleviate this conflict, such as support from coworkers, decreasing job demands, workloads, and tight deadlines; and increasing employee perceptions of control over the timing and location of work. Recently, in natural field experiment, employees' schedule control has been found to reduce work-family conflict for different types of employees. Schedule control means the ability to determine when one works, where one works, and how many hours one works (Kelly et al., 2011). Increased schedule control not only reduces work-family conflict, but decreases burnout, perceived stress, and psychological distress, and increases job satisfaction, as shown by another recent field experiment

in the U.S. (Moen et al., 2016). A Swiss analysis of Labour Force and Time Use data qualifies this positive effect of schedule control for supervisors with respect to fathers' involvement in childcare, showing that Swiss men in leadership positions are less likely to use time flexibility for involvement in childcare compared to non-supervisors, who get more involved in childcare when they have flextime (Gasser, 2015). Yet, precisely the role of supervisors seems especially important in supporting work-life balance of their team members in emotional and instrumental ways, and by setting examples (Thompson et al., 2006; Hammer et al., 2009).

The particularity of this study is threefold. First, we focus on men's work-life conflict, because we are interested in fathers' involvement in childcare. So, we use insights from two fields of research: on new masculinities and involved fatherhood, and on work-family conflict. Third, the workplace situation of fathers of small children is the privileged object of analysis without forgetting the public regulation and policies that aim to support fathers' involvement in care. More specifically, we are interested in family-supportive supervisor behaviour (FSSB) and available flexibility measures that facilitate involved fatherhood.

Methodology

Three discussion groups were conducted from May to July 2015, one with fathers employed in the public sector (Madrid), a second with fathers in small enterprises or self-employed (Seville) and the third one with fathers working at companies with 50 or more employees (Barcelona). Thus, it was a theoretically driven convenience sample, based on our previous work on involved fatherhood (Abril, Jurado-Guerrero and Monferrer, 2015). We aimed at finding fathers in dual-earner couples, significantly involved in childcare and working in different types of enterprises. First, we decided to include fathers with children up to 12 years, because this is currently the age limit for entitlement to statutory work hours' reduction². Second, we decided to exclude long-term unemployed (over a year) and self-employed working on their own, but accepted enterprises of two people and self-employed people sharing an office with others. Third, the female partners had to work full-time (at least 35 hours a week). Finally, we tried to check their involvement in childcare through three questions: measures they had taken at work in order to have more time or time flexibility to care for their children, hours per day spent with children and type of activities shared with them. They had to access at least one of the following formal measures: a transferable or longer parental leave than the statutory and non-transferable paternity leave of two weeks, a statutory reduction of work hours, a change to part-time work, a change of shift, teleworking or a morning-only working schedule. In addition, they had to self-assess spending at least two hours per day with their child(ren). Finally,

² Until 2011 the age limit was 8 years.

they had also to comply with the type of enterprise requested for the particular discussion group. The fathers were recruited through personal networks and through contacts in diverse communities of family friendly enterprises³. They were called by a female recruiter, who did not unveil the topic of the research, but asked 14 questions related to their job, the job of the female partner and time passed with their children in order to obtain all the necessary information to check if fathers fulfilled the theoretical relevant criteria.

We were able to organize a group with six parents employed in the public sector and two groups with eight parents working in small and large enterprises respectively, which means that we obtained a total sample of 22 fathers (see Annex 1 for socio-demographics of the fathers). We recruited fathers with different educational levels, and by chance it happened that we obtained somewhat lower education profiles among the small-enterprise workers compared to the large private and public sector workplaces. Fathers' average working week was 37 to 40 hours, with an average of 37 hours among the employees of very small businesses, 38 hours for the public sector workers and 40 hours for the fathers in enterprises over 50 employees. Earnings rise accordingly, from an average of 1281€, 1688€ and 2359€ respectively. These differences in earnings are also related to the fact that in the large enterprises' group seven out of eight fathers hold a supervisor position compared to three out of six in the public administration group and three out of eight in the small entrepreneurs' groups. Fathers listed the work-life conciliation measures that exist in their enterprises. In all groups, the most cited formal measures were the statutory right to reduced work hours, followed by formal flexibility to start and end working day different from standard schedule (7 out of 8 in large enterprises, 4 out of 6 in public administration and 4 out of 8 in very small enterprises), and only 4 out of 22 fathers listed the possibility to ask for teleworking, mostly in large enterprises. Yet, not always fathers mentioned all the existing possibilities, probably because they were not aware of all formal rights or because they had never thought of using them.

The discussion group is a qualitative research technique much more open than the focus group, which is more directive and has more specific research objectives. This technique has been developed fundamentally in Spain. It is a method that interprets discourses as practices, which are produced in a social setting by a group of 6 to 9 people, who do not know each other, do not know the topic and where the moderator intervenes only to summarize and direct the participants to topics related to the aims of research. In this way, participants will produce discourses conditioned by their cognitive schemata, their interpretations of the communicative and social situation, and the acceptability of their ideas in the group. The discourses are analyzed to find schemata of

³ We thank the network enterprises "New social uses of time" in Barcelona (<http://www.bcn.cat/barcelonainclusiva/es/xarxa11.html>), the social media movements Mami/PapiConcilia (<http://mamiconcilia.com/>) and Fathers with blogs "Papás blogueros" (<http://papasblogueros.com/>) for supporting this research by providing contacts.

interpretation with which the participants make sense of an area of their experience (Martín Criado, 1997). The external validity of these schemata are limited by their conditions of production, in this case a conversation around their experiences as fathers working in given types of enterprises and representing certain social strata.

The moderators of the discussion groups had an interview guide to direct the conversation (see Annex 2), which was first applied and tested with public employees in Madrid. Since it worked well, only minor changes were introduced for the other two groups in Seville and Barcelona. The guide had five parts: 1. Their experience of fatherhood; 2. Their work adaptations to balance work and family life; 3. Relations with and reactions of workmates; 4. Support or lack of it by supervisors; 5. Perception of general work-life conciliation measures in Spain. One moderator guided each discussion group, two men and one woman, who at the beginning of the session thanked fathers for participating, mentioned practical questions and only said “we are very interested in learning from your experiences as fathers of small children, all what comes to your mind related to your fatherhood”. Moderators directed conversations as little as possible, made sure all fathers participated and controlled time in order to keep the conversation within 60 to 90 minutes. At the end participants were asked to fill in a socio-demographic questionnaire and were handed 60 € vouchers⁴.

Ambivalences among involved fathers

Group participants were asked to speak about their experiences when becoming fathers. All fathers agreed that having children represented an important change in their lives and considered that childcare was part of their duties. All passed at least two hours daily caring for their offspring, despite variations within these three groups of fathers in care involvement. Many perceived themselves as being very different from their own parents, who mainly behaved as breadwinners and were marginally involved in care. This is in line with changes in fatherhood as described for other countries (Dermott, 2008), but there is variation in the perception of these changes depending on the division of care work with their female partners. Discourses in all groups showed that, in general, women seemed to care more, even among these involved fathers whose female partners were employed and had a full-time job with varying weekly work hours. This may be related to the fact that mothers became used to care alone when they were on maternity leave (16 weeks fully paid by Social Security), while solo caring was less frequent for fathers (only since 2007 a 2-week fully paid paternity leave exists). However, some fathers reported to pass more time with their

⁴ An important feature of the discussion group is the reciprocity, this is the reason why we offered a gratification in exchange for the time in which fathers are "working", producing a discourse. In addition, this is one of the features defining the group as belonging to a formal social situation.

children than their wives, because the latter work longer hours for pay than themselves. Others decided to leave or change their jobs, while their partners continued working as before childbirth, and in one case both partners had asked for work reduction in their respective jobs.

Even if men reported less involvement than mothers did, fatherhood meant for them organizing their life around the time schedules of their children and putting their needs first. Thus, fatherhood created work-family strain as known from research on work-family balance focusing on women (Thompson et al., 2007). Becoming a father created tensions within the relationship and some fathers underlined the need to find time to care for the couple relationship. In particular, the group of self-employed entrepreneurs described children as a challenge for their intimate relationships. This worried them, because it may even end up in couple dissolution. Nearly all fathers agreed that a great help to cope with work-life strains is to have access to grandparents support, but many reported not to have grandparents living nearby. Father described caring for children as harsh work, which family support and childcare services alleviated. Yet, some of the fathers reported feelings of guilt or uneasiness when children spent many hours in daycare, which again created some strain. Most agreed that work-life balance remained a utopia in the Spanish context, where most enterprises had an old-fashioned work culture, similar to factories and based on being present for long hours. So, most fathers experienced conflicting roles and demands. By contrast, fatherhood also brought about positive changes and enriched men's lives and work attitudes. One father (Alex) highlighted that he had acquired improvisation skills and this helped him to keep calm on the job.

Adaption of these fathers' jobs to parenthood varies significantly. It goes from the extreme of working long hours to the extreme of reducing working hours and ending one's job to care full-time. Involvement despite long hours is represented by Rodrigo, a father of a three-year old boy, who describes becoming a father as a shock. He is a supervisor in a masculinized enterprise, which offers entrance and exit-time flexibility. Rodrigo works 45 hours a week, earns around 1500 to 1999€ net per month and has a working schedule from 8 am until 6 pm with one hour of break for lunch. His wife has asked for working time reduction and is in charge of picking up their son at 4.30 pm from daycare. He cannot imagine taking one year of unpaid leave and he says that in his enterprise no father uses the existing formal possibility to reduce work hours. Rodrigo says that in his enterprise women who ask for work hours reduction are penalized, one way or the other. He justifies gender differences in the use of reduced working hours on the grounds of women earning less than men in most couples and does not see it as a result of an old-fashioned work culture. In addition, he criticizes the short daycare schedules and the costs for occasional childcare services, necessary during holiday time and for increasing daycare time. Ideally, he would like his enterprise to offer a childcare service. He fits with our definition of involved father because he took 15 days of the paternity leave paid by social security and linked it to his month of annual vacation. In addition,

he described bathing the child, feeding and playing with him in the evenings. On the other extreme is Pepe, a father of a 10-months old girl, who is very happy to have become a father at the age of 43. He has interrupted his “dependent” self-employment for an insurance company, to care full-time, while his wife works from 8 am to 3 pm in a masculinized enterprise. They did the maths to see if they could employ a nanny and decided that the father would care, since the mother earned more. Pepe was earning 1250 to 1499€ after tax per month. He describes having cared full-time for five months as a very hard job, because they do not get help from grandparents and he is surprised about how intensive care work of a baby really is. He is very much looking forward to the beginning of daycare in two months time.

PEPE: Sí, pero es duro, ¿eh?, es duro [...] el estar, el cuidar a un crío, es duro, ¿eh? [...] ¿te lo cuentan? ¿Te lo cuentan?

RAFAEL: Cansino, es muy /mu/ cansino.

PEPE: yyy dices: “vaaa, vaaa”...

ANTONIO: Hombre, tienes que tener una disciplina, igual que el niño, tienes que tener más disciplina que el niño.

PEPE: Sí, si disciplina y todo lo que quieras yyy, pero, ¿a mí me cuent-, a mí me cuentan antes de ser padre lo que es cuidar a mi hijo? O sea, y yo lo hago encantao porque además y soy muy padrero, me encanta, me encanta, o sea, a mí me encanta, pero fufffff, tela marinera. ¡Tela! Porqueee es, o sea essss, qué os voy a contar [...] Alguien que se quede contigo pa ducharte o alguien que se quede contigo pa hacer tus necesidades [...], ¿eso te lo cuentan antes? Y y y, yo no me lo creía. O sea, yo ahora tengo muchos amigos que son solteros, tienen mi edad, yo tengo 43 tacos y están solteros, Y: “ehhh, coño, no te quejes, no te quejes”. “No, tío, si yo no me quejo, si yo soy el tío más feliz del mundo, pero que estoy deseando que llegue septiembre pa meter el enano en la guarderíaaaa”. [se ríe] ¿Eso te lo digo yo? ¿Sabes? Porque, porque esss, fuffff ¿esss?

VÍCTOR: Un bebé es muy, muy absorbente.

PEPE: Es muy muy muy muy, es muy duro.

VÍCTOR: Muy absorbente, y es

PEPE: Yo no concibo ser padre sin que esté el padre y la madre pringaos [...] O sea, ¿yo? No lo concibo [...] Yo no lo concibo

To sum up, fathers expressed ambivalence between accepting some aspects of the traditional division of unpaid work on one hand, and experiencing work-life strains in a way similar to those of mothers. Some fathers evaluated childcare work much more after having personally experienced the difficulties and hardships of taking care of their children. Some felt guilty when small children passed many hours in childcare services. Others adapted their work schedules, changed their workplaces or even jobs to be able to invest more time in caring for the children. They felt enriched by their new fathering role and practices. Previously mothers only experienced these emotions, had these thoughts and practices of work-family strain and enrichment.

Flexible work schedules, parental leave, and teleworking

How do men adapt their work patterns to fatherhood? Do they use work-family support measures as mothers do? One important distinction that enterprises make when offering such measures to their employees is between providing time/spatial flexibility or providing in-kind benefits, such as vouchers for services, health insurance, company car, leisure activities, etc. In two of our discussion groups, fathers evaluated the importance of having time for caring compared to other benefits offered by enterprises. They unanimously stressed the importance of time for fathering compared to economic rewards for families in the group of small entrepreneurs, fathers took this for granted in the group of public employees, who nearly all had morning-only work schedules, and fathers in the group of supervisors of large enterprises were more ambivalent. The latter had longer working days and some of these fathers stressed the importance of monetary support for conciliation, for instance through vouchers for childcare services. In the group of small entrepreneurs and self-employed fathers some had high schedule control, only limited by retaining their clients. Among the more involved fathers, having more time and time flexibility and control over their schedule were clearly the winning options. For fathers that do not have schedule control, nearly all in this study, the possibility for a involvement in childcare may be achieved through four different measures:

1. **Tight time schedules**, which concentrates working hours in one part of the day, normally the morning hours.
2. **Time flexibility** to adapt the work schedule to the needs posed by childcare activities.
3. **Spatial flexibility** to save on commuting time as provided by teleworking.
4. **Leaves of absence** to care for very small or ill children.

Most fathers valued **flexible work schedules**, in particular the possibilities to enter or leave work during an interval of time and not to have a rigid schedule. This enabled them to bring children to school or to pick them up in the afternoon. Penalizations for such work adaptations were perceived as low, in particular if time flexibility was used in the mornings, since this allowed them to spend more time on the job in the afternoon. This type of time flexibility is very attractive to men, who in general emphasized risk of penalizations more than women did (Abril et al., 2015). The fathers working in large enterprises in Barcelona were offered schedule flexibility. These fathers not only were able to adapt their working schedules to school timetables, but they also had the possibility to leave the job for some hours to bring children to the doctor. In the group of public employees, this time flexibility was feasible too.

Many public employees had female partners who also were working in the public sector. In case of illness, one of them decided to stay at home. The decision about who should was often justified by the generosity of their respective collective agreements offering leave days for the care of ill children. In Spain, no statutory right to leave for child sickness exists, with the exception of a two-

day entitlement in case of serious **illness** or surgical intervention of family members up to second degree of kinship. Another time flexibility measure to enable childcare mentioned by public service and small enterprises employees was the possibility to adapt the working shift to the needs of the female partner, for instance to take turns in childcaring at home. Therefore, in case of shift-working the flexibility to choose or change shifts is also mentioned as an important measure to reduce work-life strain.

Paid paternity leave was only an important topic for those fathers with small children. In Spain, fathers encounter legal, formal and informal barriers to access leaves of absence. Currently maternity leave lasts for 16 weeks and is paid 100% of salary by social security. Women have to mandatorily take up 6 weeks, while they can transfer the remaining 10 weeks to the father. Fathers are entitled only to two non-transferable and fully paid weeks⁵. In 2015, for 100 mothers who took up maternity leave (273 thousand), 87 fathers took paternity leave (239 thousand), as shown in Figure 1. Fathers seldom take up the transferable part of maternity leave (5 thousand, see Figure 1). In Europe, fathers use well-paid (over 80% of income replacement) and non-transferable leaves, but they rarely take advantage of transferable leaves. By contrast, mothers take up non-transferable and transferable leaves, much more when they are paid and few mothers also use some unpaid leaves. This constitutes an empirical principle about leave-take up in all European countries, which is men only use non-transferable and well-paid leave (Castro-García and Pazos-Morán, 2016).

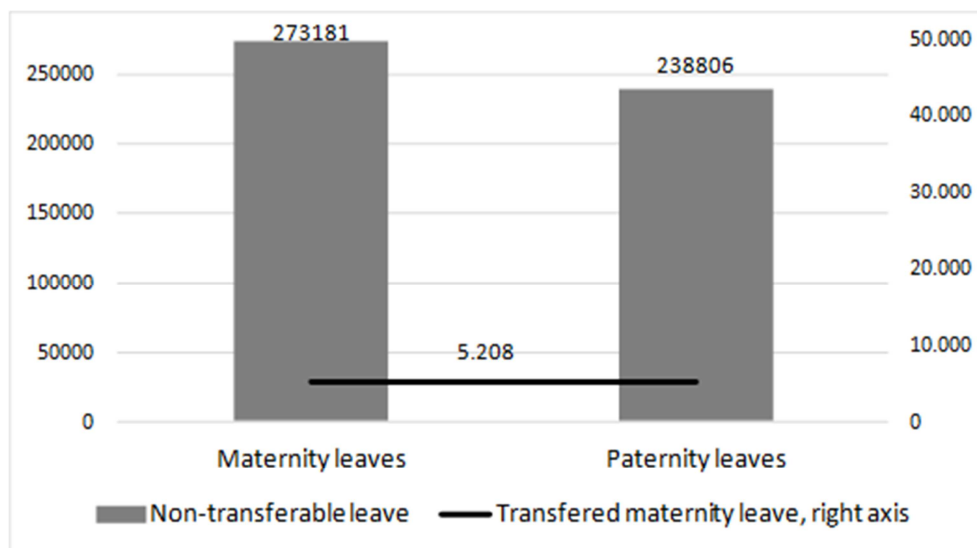


Figure 1: Maternity and paternity take-up numbers in Spain, 2015

Source: Ministerio de Empleo y Seguridad Social, 2016 .http://www.seg-social.es/Internet_1/Estadistica/Est/Otras_Prestaciones_de_la_Seguridad_Social/index.htm

One father employed in a public administration in Madrid reported that he and his wife had decided to share the maternity leave paid by social security and to take up the extra maternity and paternity leaves paid by the employer. The local administration entitles mothers to eight additional leave weeks. They had planned that, first, she should take half of the social security maternity leave (eight

⁵ Since January 2017 paternity leave has been enlarged to four weeks.

weeks), joined during the first four weeks by him⁶, and then add the eight additional weeks offered by the collective agreement. After these 16 weeks of leave of the mother, the father would have taken the remaining eight transferable weeks of the social security maternity leave. Yet, to their surprise, it turned out that taking turns of leaves between the mother and the father was not allowed. According to the Human Resources Department, the mother had to take the employer-paid leave just after the social security leave and the father had to take the transferable social security leave just when the mother ended her part of the leave. So, they were forced to take both leaves simultaneously instead of consecutively to allow for taking turns. In addition, this father of a four-months-old girl referred that older female colleagues did not understand why he wanted to share maternity leave with his wife. In the Seville group fathers discussed if paternity leave should be longer than two weeks. Most agreed on this need, but also supported the idea that smaller children should primarily be cared for by mothers. In addition, they condemned female politicians who did not take up maternity leave, because they stressed the importance of making use of entitlements offered by social security. Thus, older women and younger men sometimes have difficulties in thinking of fathers as those who take care of very small children alone. By contrast, one father in Barcelona affirmed that maternity and paternity leave should be equal for both parents in order to enable fathers to participate in care tasks in the same way as women do (Jaime). Another father, who had had the chance to take four weeks of paternity leave, did not want to miss that and asked how the other fathers had managed with only two weeks of leave. He clearly campaigned for a longer paternity leave (Alex).

The unequal design of the Spanish maternity and paternity leave system, 16 weeks for mothers and two weeks for fathers, reinforces the idea observed in some of the discourses about “natural” gender differences in the capacity to care for small children. Some enterprises offer additional weeks of leave, but they mostly maintain formal inequality, as in the municipality of Madrid. The possibility to partially transfer the maternity leave to the father is used only seldom. It is not surprising that figures on the use of maternity leave days by mothers/fathers and on the paternity leave take up (assuming all fathers take 13 days) show that mothers take up 89% of the leave time and fathers only 11% (Figure 2).

⁶ In the public administration and in particular in the collective agreement reached within the municipality of Madrid, paternity leave has to be taken just after birth and thus in temporal coincidence with the mother. Fathers are granted 2 weeks of leave paid by social security and 2 weeks of leave paid by the municipality.

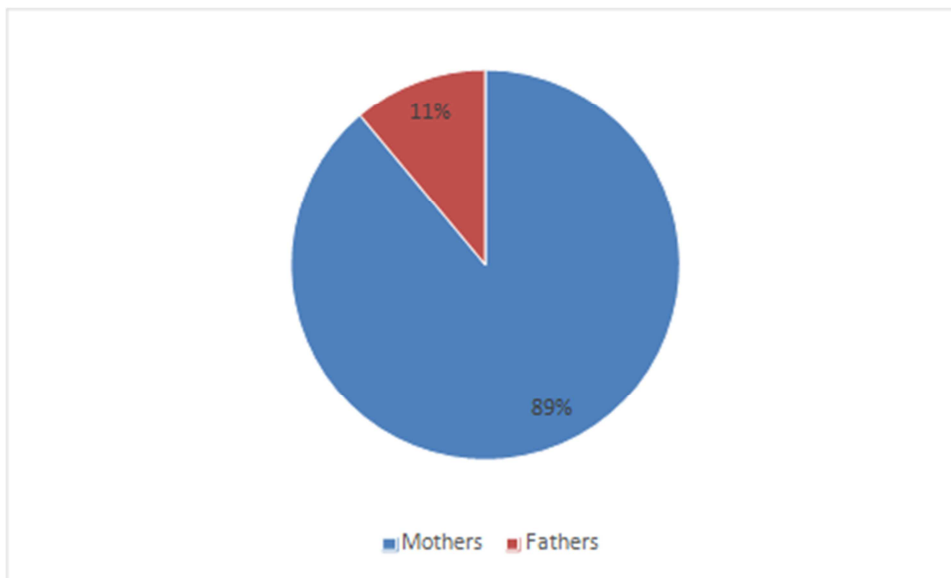


Figure 2: Distribution of paid leave time among mothers and fathers in Spain, 2015

Source: Fuente: Ministerio de Empleo y Seguridad Social, 2016 http://www.seg-social.es/Internet_1/Estadistica/Est/Otras_Prestaciones_de_la_Seguridad_Social/index.htm

In addition to paid maternity and paternity leaves, in Spain parents are entitled to two other statutory leaves: an **unpaid parental leave** until the child is three years old (*excedencia*) and the **statutory right to reduce daily working time** until the child is 12, but without earnings compensation (*reducción de jornada laboral por guarda legal*)⁷. The take-up of these measures is strongly gendered, as shown by the Labour Force Survey data of the last supplement on conciliation of work and family life, which was conducted in 2010⁸. They surveyed employed mothers and fathers with children under age eight. Of these 10.5% of mothers had taken some time of unpaid parental leave against 0.7% of fathers, which provides a gender gap of 9.8 percent points. Within the same group 26% of mothers took advantage from statutory work hours reduction for some time, whereas only 4.1% of men did, yielding an even larger gender gap of 21.9 percent points. Given the reduction of pay implied by these two additional leaves, it is not surprising to find that also among the involved fathers of the three discussion groups only four fathers had taken work reduction or unpaid leave. Only one father had a reduced working time when we did the fieldwork (Gabriel) and another had used it in the past during one year (Rubén). A third father had taken in the past one month of unpaid leave (Ernesto) and another was planning to take four months of unpaid parental leave to care for his six-months-old child (Joan).

⁷ Article 37, paragraph 6 and article 46, paragraph 3 of *Real Decreto Legislativo 2/2015, de 23 de octubre, por el que se aprueba el texto refundido de la Ley del Estatuto de los Trabajadores*.

⁸ Data retrieved online from INE, EPA, Módulo año 2010. Conciliación entre la vida laboral y la familiar: http://www.ine.es/dynt3/inebase/index.htm?type=pcaxis&path=/t22/e308/meto_05/modulo/base_2011/2010/&file=pcaxis&L=0

Fathers explained why they found it difficult to take advantage of these statutory entitlements to **unpaid leave or statutory work reduction**. First, they thought that a reduction of work hours goes often hand in hand with penalizations in the job, such as change of workplace, of responsibilities or work assignments, or even entail a job loss. They listed examples of women suffering these penalizations and some referred to own experiences. Joan reduced his work during one year and he said “reducing one hour of work during one year to be able to pick up the children at school, was not a good idea in professional terms, but anyway, it was good for the family”. Alex reported that his supervisor thought he would take unpaid parental leave after the birth of his first child and anticipating it, she changed the clients assigned to him. Ernesto said he intended to take three months of unpaid leave, but he had to return after one month, because his clients had been assigned to some work colleagues, and the former did not like relating to his colleagues, because they had to start from scratch. Pablo, another father working in a large enterprise, also expressed that leaving for two months might not create too many problems, but leaving for one year may imply that the person replacing you would become a competitor. In addition to these organizational challenges and penalizations, some fathers pointed also to the economic burden. For instance in the large enterprise where Rodrigo works, parental leave is only allowed if you take a minimum of one year and he perceived the lack of income during one year as a problem, and also pointed to other professional penalizations. Joan, who was planning to take an unpaid leave for four months, countered that he did it to support his wife career, and he hoped that in his enterprise, belonging to educational sector, his leave would not penalize him too much. Still another father justified the gender bias in parental leave uptake, because he thought that most often the female partners earned less than the man did. Alex, a father of two children disagreed and stated that it was also a question of setting priorities in one’s life. He gave the example of short work absences, which were perceived as problematic by his work colleagues, such as meetings with teachers or school festivals, while for the same coworkers attending a funeral or leaving for an important sports’ event did not cause problems. Fathers in the public sector discussion group stressed another problematic fact related to reducing work hours or leaving for some time. They said that the austerity measures that had been imposed in response to the Great Recession had increased in general the workload and, under these new work conditions, colleagues were less willing to replace people who took advantage of such family support measures. Self-employed fathers and fathers working in small enterprises also told that leaving or reducing work hours were inadequate support measures, because they would entail a reduction of the salary and increased risk of being fired.

Teleworking is a measure that is similarly used by women and men in Spain but not widespread yet, because in 2015 only a total of 6.5% of employed people worked sometimes or regularly from home, as shown in Figure 3. By contrast, in the European-Union-15 a total of 16% did so. There is

also some variation by gender in the frequency of teleworking. In Spain only 2% of women are occasional teleworkers, while more men do sometimes work from home (3.4%). However, the proportion of men and women working regularly from home is the same (3.5%). A great difference exists by professional status in Spain, since homework, be it regular or occasional is much more used by self-employed people than by employees. Around 1-2% of employees telework against 10-12% of self-employed (with and without employees). In UE-15 significantly more people only work sometimes from home compared to those teleworking regularly, and on average slightly more men (11.7%) than women (9.9%) do work sometimes from home. In Spain teleworking is as attractive or even more for male than it is for female employed population.

Probably this family support measure is more attractive for men, because it does not reduce salary and it affects workmates much less. Instead of having all time face to face relations, a teleworking employee diversifies his relationship with other colleagues and increases his telephone and email communication. For some jobs continuous face to face relations may be necessary, but for many others this does not apply. However, for women teleworking can reinforce their traditional role as caregivers and housewives by increasing their presence in at home.

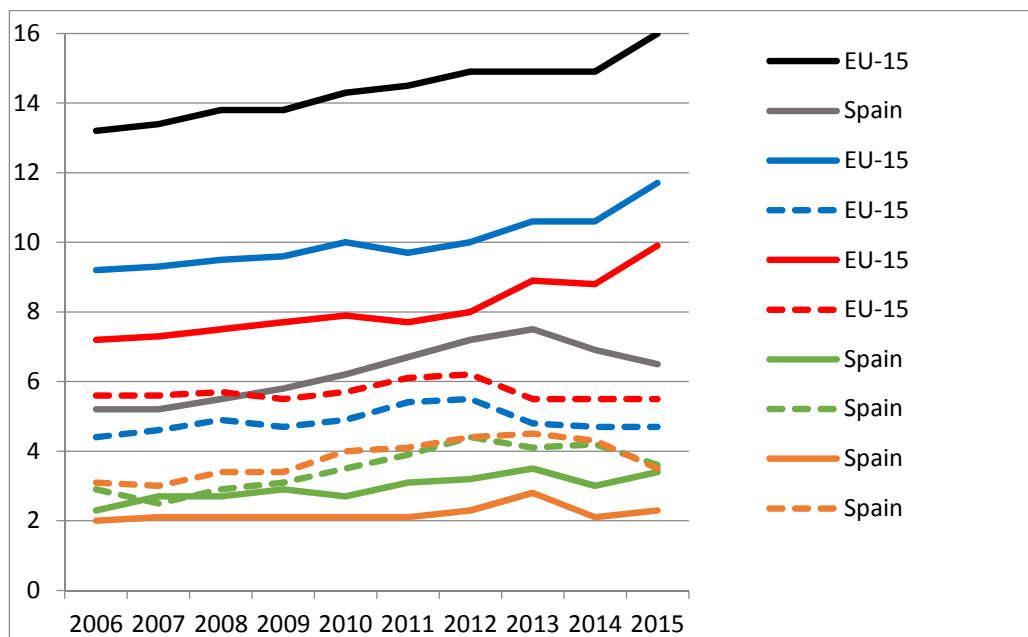


Figure 3: Employees working at home usually/sometimes⁹ EU-15 and Spain, 2006-2015

Source: Eurostat, ELFS, online, 2017.

Among the fathers in the discussion groups, teleworking is a measure frequently used in large enterprises and sometimes mentioned by the self-employed, but surprisingly not mentioned by the fathers working in the public sector. This is probably so because in the public sector this is not yet widespread formalized entitlement, but the exception rather than the rule. The interviewed public

⁹ "Usually" means working at home half of the days worked in a reference period of four preceding weeks. "Sometimes" means working at home less than half of the days worked, but at least one hour during the preceding four weeks.

sector employees in Madrid worked in four different administrations, and only in one, a university, they were entitled to telework¹⁰. In the large enterprises discussion group, two fathers teleworked regularly and two other occasionally. In the Seville group, one self-employed father always worked from home and another father, who worked with his wife in the family enterprise, worked sometimes from home. These teleworking fathers referred to some conditions that make telework feasible, such as the importance of having the necessary peace and physical isolation from children at home to be able to concentrate. Sometimes these fathers had to explain to workmates and family members that working from home did not mean that they had freedom to do other things or to work less. For them telework seemed to mean saving commuting time and so they were able to bring or take children to/from school. An interesting case is Alex who had to struggle for many year to obtain the right to telework. He had to convince his supervisors and to defend it before the workers' council. He began teleworking eight years ago when he then had already been working for nearly 20 years in a large service company. Before he had already asked for a change of department to have a morning-only workday, because he wanted to have more leisure time. This was long before becoming a father. Then he began asking for telework and when the company began to create a pilot experiment on teleworking he was accepted. When he later became a father, he worked three days per week from home. His wife had to reduce her working time to be able to choose another working schedule. Alex related that it was always a struggle to obtain these work adaptations and that as a man he was a pioneer in his company when asking for measures to support work-life balance, and people were even more surprised that he asked for them when he was not yet a father. The workers' council did not like telework, because in their view this isolated people and made it easier for the company to take unilateral decisions.

Most parents agreed that in Spain work-life balance is easier in the public sector, followed by large enterprises and more difficult in small enterprises. Yet, interestingly enough fathers in the discussion group on employees in small enterprises (dependent self-employed, self-employed professional and employees in small enterprises of up to five employees) reported that their work-family conflict was low and had even decreased compared to previous jobs. Some of these fathers had been working previously in medium to large enterprises, but left them because of the difficulties to combine job and family demands. As **self-employed and co-owners of a family/small enterprise** they reported to have more schedule control. So one can argue that these activity situations can help reduce work-family strain, if the services offered by these self-employed professionals receive sufficient demand. In addition, it must be remembered that these fathers highly valued their personal and family time, even if this meant having lower earnings, as in fact

¹⁰ Yet, the father working in the administration of this university does not list this possibility, probably because he does not know it or, in practice, few people take advantage of it.

they display in comparison to the other fathers. Two fathers had gone through a phase of unemployment, which they used to become temporary stay-at-home dads. In one case, it was due to an economic rational choice within the couple, since she earned more and had less precarious job conditions than he had. In the other case, the couple decided to favour the career of the mother, while the father ended his contract with a large multinational company, recycled himself and later created a small enterprise with two associates. A third father did not interrupt his work, but worked from home for one year in order become the primary childcarer. These men decided to prioritize family and work as equally important when they became fathers and chose self-employed and entrepreneur jobs that made this possible. Very interesting examples are Víctor and Ernesto who quit their previous jobs in large enterprises to reduce their work-family conflict. Ernesto was a father of two thirteen-year old children and two four-year old ones, four in total. Before he had worked for a large enterprise, where he had had problems to take three months of parental leave. Then and for 12 years, he had a small enterprise jointly with his wife and two other employees. They got their clients used to a morning schedule and the year before our conversation, after summer holidays, they wrote clients a letter stating that they fixed their working hours from 8 am to 3 pm. They lost some clients, but anyway these were perceived as problematic ones, who might have been lost later on for any other reason. They also tried to treat their employees as workmates and last year they supplemented the two statutory weeks of marriage leave with another one, as a present for one of them when she got married. Ernesto acts a family-supportive supervisor, which according to previous research is one of the most important factors to reduce work family conflict (Hammer et al., 2009). The informal culture of a company, as perceived by workers and co-workers is also considered of utmost importance to enable work-family conciliation (Thompson et al., 2007).

Supervisors and co-workers' informal support

In fact, all fathers mentioned the importance of their supervisors' support and described some supervisors who understood them and tried to support their work-family balance but also some others who did not. They did not see gender or generational differences or differences between fathers and mothers, but perceived some supervisors as more empathic. Most often these understood their work-family conflicts, because they also had to solve similar ones. However, older supervisors seemed less exposed to own work-family conflicts, because they normally had a traditional family arrangement, where the man was the male breadwinner and his wife was responsible for care. It was also not seen as a question of the sex of the supervisor. Female supervisors, who had family help or who outsourced care, were reported to be less sensitive to childcare needs, too. They agree that empathy of supervisors depends much on their own personal situation, as described by Pablo, Agustín and Alex from the large enterprises discussion group:

PABLO: ¿Pero estáis de acuerdo en que afecta muchísimo si tu jefe tiene hijos o no? Porque en mi caso, o sea, es una empresa...

ALEX: [asiente]

PABLO: ... con 2 socios, uno de ellos con hijos, el otro sin hijos y van a... totalmente diferente.

AGUSTÍN: Mira, yo, yo que también es una empresa relativamente grande, depende. Porque te encuentras el jefe que tiene... 3 o 4 o 5 hijos, pero que su mujer no trabaja, y entonces lo que él piensa es que tu mujer no tiene que trabajar para que tú te desarrolles profesionalmente, entonces eso es peor.

[...]

ALEX: [...] la diferencia fue que me pusieron un jefe que era hombre, que su mujer también trabajaba y que tenía hijos. Esa fue la gran diferencia porque mi jefa, que era soltera y que no tenía hijos,[...], es que no me entendía, ni a mí ni a las compañeras que... Yo estoy con él, y no dependía tanto si era hombre o mujer, [...] Yo con mi jefe no he tenido nunca ningún problema, ¿por qué? Pues porque decía “mira, que a la Nuria le pasa esto”, es que ni me preguntaba, ni me preguntaba. [...] esa empatía de [...] que a él alguna vez también le había pasado que su hija, y eso que era mucho más grande, que tenía hijas de, de 15, 16 años, que se ponían enfermas, que tenía que yo qué sé, que llevarlas a no sé dónde y entre, y entre los dos nos cubríamos. Yo pienso que, que, que esa empatía eh... si no existe lo tienes muy mal, es que lo tienes muy mal.

In addition, the relationship with a supervisor might be good, because they treat the employees as equals, as Ernesto who said that he treated his employees like himself. Thus, formal and informal supervisor support was seen as very important. Informal support is key to reduce work-family conflict in small enterprises, because they normally have less formal family support measures. Another type of relationship seems to develop when the employed father subordinates his needs to his supervisors' needs, as one father reported. The supervisor may award discretionary benefits to supervisees who always accept instructions and demands, but this may cause tensions with coworkers (cf. Burawoy (1979) and Roy (1959)). Coworkers may feel discriminated against or at least penalized in comparison. These different relations between supervisors and supervisee occur also in large enterprises, and sometimes formal work-life measures cause tensions too.

Fathers divided coworkers in those who are in favour of family support measures and help, and those who react enviously and feel threatened, either because they had not been able to benefit from support measures when their children were small or because their personal life needs were considered as less relevant or even irrelevant by the enterprise. This is mentioned in the public administration group, for instance. Diego told that the municipality had decided that parents of children up to age 12 should be entitled to an additional month of morning shift during summer months, i.e. starting earlier in the morning and finishing earlier in the afternoon. All employees have three months of summer schedule (15th June until 15th September, while parents with small children have four months of summer schedule (1st June-until 30th September):

DIEGO - Entonces dices, pero vamos a ver. Es decir, si tú has recuperado un derecho que había antes, que eran tres meses, y lo único es que, un colectivo que tiene hijos menores de doce años y que tienen unas necesidades, ha ganado esto, me ha llamado la atención cómo socialmente ha generado esta corriente de... de envidia, porque no sé definirlo quizás de otra manera. Sin pensar aunque sea egoístamente, es decir, joder, es que como no tengamos hijos, de aquí a veinte años, aquí esto no lo sostiene ni Dios.

GABRIEL – No, y que una cosa como esa puede ser la punta de lanza para una reforma que luego vaya a abarcar a más gente...

DIEGO – Claro, ¿cómo vamos a avanzar hacia delante si cuando se consiguen estas medidas, por parte de la población que no tiene hijos se perciben como un ataque hacia su colectivo? Dices, “¿qué estamos haciendo mal? ¿Cómo estamos enfocando mal esto...?”.

In addition, fathers reported that elderly men and women did often question fathers' involvement in childcare, because for them it was a given that childcare was a female task. So, coworkers can informally support father's use of formal support measures, but some examples mentioned in the three discussion groups indicate quite the opposite, coworkers reacting with suspicion or envy. This points to an important barrier, in particular, in small enterprises where absence due to leaves or statutory work reduction may imply that co-workers have to back the absent father by taking over from him part or all of the work left undone. This may be counteracted, if coworkers can expect reciprocity in a foreseeable future or if their workload does not increase because a formal substitution for the “absent” father is ensured.

Something that would need a more specific analysis are the ideas of trade-union representatives and their positions regarding family support measures, in general, and measures directed to and taken up by fathers in particular. This dimension affects more the larger enterprises and the public administration. As previously mentioned, in the enterprise where Alex works, workers' council demand the enterprise to pay for and provide a bus to facilitate employees commuting from home to work, while they are against teleworking:

ALEX: Pero es que en [mi empresa] hay una cosa más gorda, el Comité de empresa está en contra del teletrabajo.

JAIME: ¡Qué fuerte!

RUBÉN: Fuerte.

MODERADOR: ¿Por qué, con qué argumentos?

ALEX: El argumento es [...] que el empresario nos tiene separados, eh digamos nos tiene aislados de lo que es el colectivo y así es mucho más fácil, es mucho más fácil hacer con nosotros lo que quieran. Y que no deja de ser un acuerdo individual. [...]

ALEX: [...] La reivindicación [del comité de empresa] es que nos pongan un autocar. Yo no quiero que me pongan un autocar, yo en el metro voy bien, con los guiris, quiero decir, eh... yo mi reivindicación es que me dejen, me dejen mi trabajo y... y... y bueno y que yo sea el que decida, [...] es una cuestión de concepción de una empresa muy antigua, muy antigua y de concepción muy antigua. [...] la empresa y el Comité [de

empresa] tiene esa concepción fabril. Es muy triste decirlo porque somos una empresa que en teoría somos la punta de la tecnología, o sea somos lo más parecido a... al sello de... Es así.

Summing up, this study confirms the importance of the family support supervisor behaviour, as shown in previous research. It adds the barriers encountered by coworkers, who may not understand specific measures when directed only to parents of small children, or when directed to fathers instead of mothers. In addition, some coworkers and employees' representatives even show hostility and envy towards formal family supportive measures, if they interpret that these are trade-offs between different demands towards employers.

Conclusions

The aim of this study has been to ask involved fathers of children up to age 12 about their experiences with formal and informal family support measures in their working environment, and to know how their jobs favoured or discouraged involvement in childcare. Conversations with 22 fathers covering different occupations and types of enterprises make it possible to confirm some findings of previous research, conducted mainly in the United States, and to add new insights about ways to reduce work-family conflict. The analyzed Spanish fathers also describe the relevance of family support by their supervisors to be able to use time and spatial flexibility. Fathers in the public sector and in large enterprises highlight the importance of being able to arrive later or leave earlier at their workplace, because they can use formal schedule flexibility at entrance and exit within a schedule with fixed core working hours. Due to a distinct public policy context in Spain, where more paid maternity and paternity leaves exist than in the US, this research highlights the importance for fathers to take up paid paternity leave and be able to work tight schedules, mornings only, in the public administration. Fathers in the discussion groups underline those family support measures that provide them with more free time, but also agree on the inconveniences of using unpaid parental leave and statutory work hours' reduction. This is in line with official statistics on the take-up of both policies according to sex and constitutes a clear gender division in the way employees seek work-life balance.

This analysis shows that fathers avoid taking measures that penalize mostly in terms of income and career prospects. Very few fathers reported having used or planning to take unpaid parental leave or to use their statutory right to reduce work hours when having a child below age 13 and justify it referring to economic rationality (mothers earn on average less than fathers) or to present and future penalizations. Instead, they are much more willing to undertake two other, less publicly regulated, work adaptations. On one hand, fathers in large enterprises and small entrepreneurs list the advantages of teleworking and five fathers sometimes or regularly do telework. This is in line with

representative data on homework in Spain, which shows a very small gender gap compared to the very large gender gap in parental leave uptake rates. Fathers described not only facilitating measures, but also barriers.

Contrary to the ideas expressed by all fathers that work-life balance was easiest in the public sector, followed by large enterprises and worse in small enterprises, it was surprising to find that several fathers had to leave large multinational companies, because work-family conflict had become a big issue and quitting was the only solution they found. Afterwards, some entered the public administration and others became self-employed or small entrepreneurs. The fathers in the last two groups had achieved a high schedule control, which had significantly reduced their work-family conflict and facilitated their involvement in childcare.

Fathers in the three discussion groups reported another barrier to involvement in childcare, which was not found in our previous research review. They told about the lack of understanding and about envious attitudes of coworkers in face of specific family support measures, in particular if they are targeted only the needs of parents and not other work-family conflicts, as for instance, taking care of frail elderly dependents.

What policy recommendations can we make, if the objective is to enable fathers to have time and flexibility to care for their children, and to reduce the gender bias of family support measures of public and enterprise policies? First, policies should be conceptualized as supporting work-life balance for all employees, not only for those who have small children, because the reduction of work-family conflict is in general positively related to employees' wellbeing and health and to productivity. Second, the aim should be to give employees the control over their work schedules, and where this is not possible family support measures should not stigmatize and penalize those benefiting from them. This is only possible if men and women equally take advantage of these. Measures that do not make sure that personal income is well replaced, such as unpaid full or part-time parental leave, are refused by men and thus stigmatize women, who more often accept current and future penalizations. In one sentence, measures to enable work-life balance should be formally designed for all employees and avoid the unintended creation of flexibility stigmas that end up in penalizations.

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Annex 1 Socio-demographic characteristics of fathers in each discussion group

EMPRESAS DE LA ADMINISTRACIÓN PÚBLICA(MADRID)

Nombre	Edad	Formación	Edad hijos (años)	Ocupación	Ingresos netos mensuales (euros)
César	47	Universitario	16 y 11	Policía Municipal	1500-1999
Gabriel	48	Bachillerato	10 y 5	Técnico laboratorio	1250-1499
Bernabé	35	Diplomatura (Trabajo Social)	4 meses	Técnico Centro de día mayores	1500-1999
Diego	42	FP II (Informática)	2	Informático	1500-1999
Alfonso	45	Selectividad	7	Auxiliar Administrativo	1500-1999
Francisco	37	Diplomatura + Máster	3	Militar	1500-1999

PEQUEÑAS EMPRESAS Y AUTÓNOMOS (SEVILLA)

Nombre	Edad	Formación	Edad hijos (años)	Ocupación	Ingresos netos mensuales (euros)
Víctor	41	Licenciado (Derecho)	4	Abogado (Autónomo, 3 socios en bufete)	500-999
Alejandro	34	Ingeniero Industrial	3 y 5	Empleado cuenta ajena y trabajo a turnos	1500-1999
Ernesto	40	Graduado Social	13 ; 4 y 4	Empresario Asesoría Jurídica familiar, 2 socios y 1 empleada (dos empleadas en periodos de trabajo concretos)	2000-2499
Pepe	43	FP II Protésico Dental	10 meses	Amo de casa por decisión, antes vendedor de seguros como falso autónomo	1250-1499
Rafael	44	E.S.O.	8 y 6	Trabajos verticales (Empresa familiar, 2 socios con empleados por temporadas)	1250-1499

Juan	40	Graduado Escolar	10 y 6	Albañil (Empleado por cuenta ajena)	Menos de 500
Miguel	36	FP Superior	1	Comercial (Empleado cuenta ajena)	1000-1249
Antonio	47	Aparejador + Técnico en PRL	4	Formación online y presencial esporádicamente (Autónomo))	1000-1249

GRANDES EMPRESAS (BARCELONA)

Nombre	Edad	Formación	Edad hijos (años)	Ocupación	Ingresos netos mensuales (euros)
Rodrigo	35	Diplomado (Relaciones Laborales)	3	Mando intermedio (logística en Ind. Química)	1500-1999
Agustín	38	Ingeniero Industrial	5 y 1mes	Directivo (logística en Ind. hidrocarburos)	-
Alex	45	Licenciado en Economía y Técnico en PRL	5 y 2	Mando intermedio (Dep. Finanzas en Telecomunicaciones)	3000-3999
Joan	35	Diplomado en Magisterio Musical	6 meses	Profesor de primaria	1250-1499
Roberto	40	Diplomatura Estadística	2	Técnico Estudios de mercados	2000-2499
Jaime	38	Ingeniero Técnico Informático	4 y 1	Responsable departamento de sistemas (Ind. Química)	2000-2499
Pablo	37	Licenciado en Periodismo	7; 6 y 4	Responsable departamento marketing digital	2500-2999
Rubén	51	Bachillerato	15 y 10	Administrativo y comité empresa (Universidad privada)	2000-2499

Annex 2: Thematic guide to conduct the discussion groups

