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*Trude Lappegård*

**Couples' Parental Leave Practices**  
**The Role of the Workplace Situation**

**Abstract:**

We address the issue of the relationship between couples' parental leave practices and their workplace situation. This analysis is based on information from Norwegian administrative registers on around 200 000 couples, covering a period of almost 10 years. The most common practice among couples is that a father makes use of his exclusive right to father's leave and the mother uses all common leave. There are few obstacles in fathers' workplaces limiting father's leave, except in workplaces where there are high costs involved. Parental leave practices involving couples sharing part of their common leave are associated both with mothers' workplaces, with higher costs of absence, and fathers' workplaces, with lower costs of absence.

**Keywords:** gender, parenthood, parental leave, work

**JEL classification:** I38, J18

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**Address:** Trude Lappegård, Statistics Norway, Research Department.  
E-mail: [trude.lappegard@ssb.no](mailto:trude.lappegard@ssb.no)

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## Introduction

Norwegian family policy has been oriented towards promoting equality between parents. Generally, the Nordic countries are characterized as having one welfare state model, by which all countries have policies supporting a dual-earner family model (Korpi, 2000, Esping-Andersen, 2002). They are also often described as leaders of progress towards gender equality. Nordic family policies and gender equality have been closely intertwined, and welfare state interventions in gender issues and family arrangements have been widely accepted (Ellingsæter and Leira, 2006, Nordic Council of Ministers, 1995). The combination of high employment and fertility rates of mothers is often taken as an indicator of the impact of parenthood policies facilitating the reconciliation of work and childcare for both mothers and fathers (e.g., Daly, 2000, Esping-Andersen, 2002, Stier et al., 2001). In the Nordic countries, the majority of women, including mothers of young children, are employed outside the home, for example in Norway three out of four mothers with children under the age of three were in the labour force in 2006, although a high percentage works part-time. In addition, men seem to be more active in childrearing and household activities than in many other countries (Kitterød and Pettersen, 2006).

The parental leave policy in Norway has a clear goal of making childbearing and childrearing more compatible with working life. The parental leave scheme is complex. In addition to a common right each parent has an individual right. Couples are free to share their common leave as they like, and the outcome of this division is the result of a twofold process: one that takes place within the family and between partners, and another that takes place in relation to each parent's workplace. The aim of this article is to investigate the relationship between couples' parental leave practices and their workplace factors. The processes that take place between a couple and between each parent and his/her workplace are closely intertwined. To understand these processes better, we take a couple's perspective. This means that we have information about both the mother and the father in the same couple. We focus on the association between combinations of mothers' and fathers' workplace characteristics and parental leave practices. From this, we obtain greater insight into whether different parental leave practices result from certain combinations of parents' workplace situations.

The Norwegian register provides abundant data on parents' backgrounds. There is detailed information, covering a period of almost 10 years, about mothers' and fathers' parental leave, education, income and, importantly, information about different workplace characteristics of the parents' jobs. Since the question addressed in this article concerns couples' use of parental leave, we include only couples in which the mother took parental leave. This means that single parents were not

included, nor were couples in which the mother was not entitled to parental leave, i.e., did not participate in the labour market. The analysis was performed separately for one-child and two-child couples.

## **The parental leave programme**

The Norwegian parental leave programme provides compensation for loss of earned income up to a maximum amount of one year. The scheme secures mothers' rights in the labour market, i.e., provides mothers the right to return to the same position after a period of paid leave and a possible period of additional unpaid leave of up to one year. The policy also reduces the direct costs of foregone income during absence from work in connection with childbirth. In 1993 Norway was a pioneer country in the introduction of a period of leave exclusively for fathers. One month of the total paid parental leave period with benefits was reserved for fathers, which would be lost if it was not used (a fifth week was added in 2005 and a sixth in 2006). The aim of father's leave was to contribute to a real change in the gender balance of caring responsibilities, and restructuring of the gender divisions in unpaid work. The parental leave programme thus had a double aim: to facilitate continuous employment among mothers, and to increase participation in childcare among fathers (Ellingsæter, 2007). After almost 15 years with father's exclusive leave, the majority of fathers exercise their right, but parents' share of their common parental leave still shows great differences between genders, and only 15 per cent of fathers use more leave than has been assigned to them.

## **Negotiated families and parental leave**

While family life in earlier times was more gender-specialized, with clear expectations of roles, partners in modern families to a large degree negotiate common decisions (Beck, 1992, Beck and Beck-Gernsheim, 1995). The negotiation processes in modern families can be seen as an outcome of different factors. From an economic-demographic approach, it can be argued that couples' use of parental leave is a result of the degree of specialization of each parent, by which each parent devotes time and attention to the things they do best. The argument is that decision making within a family and between spouses is for the purpose of achieving a decision that maximizes utility: couples maximize household utility or efficiency by rationally assigning to each partner tasks that he or she does best with the least amount of time investment (Becker, 1981, 1991). Another argument within rational choice theory is that decision making is based on the relative power of each partner, and thus a discrepancy in economic resources creates an imbalance in marital power that leads to a more gender-specific division of labour (Deutsch et al., 1993, Aldous et al., 1998, Shelton and John, 1996). The

relative resources (human capital) of each parent influence the use of parental leave in that discrepancies in partners' relative resources create imbalance in marital power and thus in parents' use of parental leave; i.e., mothers take the lion's share of parental leave. Several analyses from the Scandinavian context find support for such arguments. A Norwegian analysis of the use of father's leave, based on survey data and conducted two years after exclusive leave was introduced, suggests that fathers' high incomes and positions had a negative effect on the use of father's leave (Brandth and Kvande, 2001). In addition, a Swedish register analysis conducted before a similar allocation of a portion of parental leave to fathers was introduced suggests that both fathers' and mothers' higher earnings had positive effects on fathers' use of parental leave, and that fathers' earnings had a greater impact than mothers' (Sundström and Duvander, 2002). Furthermore, a Norwegian register analysis covering a period of five years following the introduction of father's leave suggests that increasing gender balance in breadwinning increases fathers' use of parental leave. That is, if the data are controlled for individual characteristics such as educational level and income, fathers take more parental leave the more mothers contribute to the family economy, and the more equal their earnings are (Lappegård, 2008).

The process of bargaining over how to share parental leave is affected not only by individual factors, but also by structural conditions in the labour market. For instance, it has been argued that since women usually perform a greater share of the work in the home, they choose jobs that are most compatible with childcare responsibilities (Polachek, 1987). This means that the career opportunity costs of taking parental leave can be higher for women in some parts of the labour market than in others. Thus, it has been argued that the costs of taking long parental leave are higher in male-dominated occupations (Hansen, 1995), and further that female-dominated occupations fit better with domestic commitments (e.g., Jacobs, 1995, Polachek, 1987). Family-friendly working conditions can generally be characterized as those that provide good opportunities for flexible working hours and low costs of remaining out of the labour market for a period in connection with childbirth. From such arguments, it is likely that mothers working in jobs characterized as "family-friendly" take longer periods of parental leave than mothers working in other types of jobs. Also, as the opportunity costs of withdrawal from the labour market are lower in some parts of the labour market, it is likely that fathers working in so-called "family-friendly" jobs also take longer periods of leave. Family friendliness may also be embedded in the organizational culture of the workplace. Interestingly, a Swedish survey study has examined the impact of organizational culture on men's usage of parental leave in Sweden (Haas et al., 2002). The findings suggest that men's use of parental leave is significantly affected by organizational culture, including the company's commitment to caring values, level of "father friendliness" and support for women's equal employment opportunities, fathers' perception of support

from senior managers, and perceptions of work group norms that reward task performance versus long hours at work (Haas et al., 2002).

Another Swedish study using register data suggests that workplace characteristics correlate with the division of parental leave, but the father's workplace has a stronger influence than the mother's workplace on father's parental leave use (Bygren and Duvander, 2006). Generally, the authors expected characteristics of the mother's workplace to have the strongest correlation with division of parental leave, in contrast to those of the father's workplace. The rationale for this is that her costs of absence influence *her* willingness to share leave with the father. The findings show that fathers working in the private sector, at small or male-dominated workplaces are less likely to take parental leave, while if the mother is working in a female-dominated workplace, then the father uses less parental leave. This may be explained by her costs of absence being low in these workplaces, while women at male-dominated workplaces may be criticized if they take a long period of parental leave, and thus may have difficulty retaining their positions (Bygren and Duvander, 2006).

For our analysis, we expect a correlation between workplace characteristics and parental leave practices that varies according to different combinations of mothers' and fathers' workplace characteristics. First, we expect the public sector to have a strong influence on parents' use of parental leave. The public sector is not driven by profit, and absence from work has no direct consequences on economic productivity. Moreover, more importantly in the Norwegian context, the direct costs of taking leave in the public sector are lower than in the private sector for parents with earnings exceeding the fixed ceiling for income replacement as the public sector (as employers) compensates for the discrepancy. Second, we expect ratios of men to women, hereafter referred to as gender divisions in the workplace to influence parents' parental leave use, but that the gradient will be stronger according to the gender division of the mother's workplace. The argument for this is a general assumption that the opportunities to take long absences from work are better and the cost is lower. Since mothers' willingness to share leave with fathers is influenced by the cost of absence, we can expect that gender division at the mother's workplace has a stronger influence than that at the father's. Third, we expect workplace size to influence parents' parental leave use, but that the gradient is stronger for the father. Generally, we can assume that small workplaces are more vulnerable to absence from work, because it can be difficult to rearrange work tasks or arrange a replacement. Although mothers are expected to take leave in any case, fathers may be under more pressure to limit leave.

## Parental leave and fathers' practices

Exclusive father's leave can be seen as a new norm for 'good' fathering, with its mandatory pressure towards family involvement (Leira, 2002). It has been argued that fathers actively construct various paternal practices through 'negotiations' with parental leave provisions (the state) and working conditions (the market), and with the mother of the child (Brandth and Kvande, 2002). The outcome of the various negotiation processes can be labelled fathers' practices (Morgan, 1996).

Four different fathers' practices have been identified from a qualitative analysis in Norway, indicating how fathers cope with demands and opportunities in their work situation (Brandth and Kvande, 2002). Although these practices are not discussed from a couple perspective, the analysis acknowledges the importance of the father/mother negotiation in understanding the construction of fathers' practices.

*Limit-setting practice* describes fathers who take the father's leave and share the common part of the parental leave with the mother. Their motives for doing so vary, but they have a common wish to spend as much time as possible with their children. They see the leave as a necessary part of becoming thoroughly acquainted with their children. Their strong motivation can also be seen in how these fathers share parental leave with the mothers, even if this causes them financial losses.

*Unrestrained practice* describes fathers who have used their father's leave, but have never shared the common part of the parental leave with the mother. They are entitled to all types of leave, and receive full wage compensation. Nevertheless, they have not used the leave for its intended purpose, i.e., as a chance to take the major responsibility for a child over an extended period, and strengthen the father/child relation. There are two main types of unrestrained fathers' practices. The first is when the leave is adapted to a father's job, the other when fathers' leave is taken when the mother is home, or as part of a joint vacation. *Right-using practice* also describes fathers who have taken their father's leave, but have never shared the common part of the parental leave with the children's mother. This category comprises those fathers who take father's leave as intended; they stay home with the child while the mother returns to work. The majority would not take any leave days if the new scheme had not offered them. Thus, many accept the offer. Father's leave is granted as a right, virtually equivalent to a reduction in working hours and, accordingly, fathers must take it. Like the limit-setting practice, this is an example of how leave schemes set guidelines for work situations. This means that leave from work is taken automatically, and the fathers in this group would not take the leave if it were not allocated to them. *Tradition-bound practice* describes fathers who have not used the leave rights to which they are entitled. Some take a few days of leave for a birth, but do not use father's leave. There can be different reasons for this practice, such as structural boundaries, i.e., self-employment or economic losses

because of mother's part-time work, or less demands from work environment for father's involvement at home.

These four fathers' practices are used to classify fathers' use of parental leave in the analysis. It is argued that fathers cannot be "forced" to stay at home by leave schemes, but strong guidelines can be established for their choices. In addition, it is argued that fathers need help from the state to set limits and make it legitimate to take leave from work (Brandth and Kvande, 2002). In this article we distinguish between three groups of fathers' practices: fathers taking no parental leave (traditional practice); fathers taking father's leave and sharing common leave with mothers (limit-setting practice) and fathers only taking father's leave (unrestrained practice and right-using practice). Since we used register data, we were not able to ascertain whether father's leave was used as intended or not, and thereby distinguish between unrestrained practice and right-using practice. However, in this article, we focus on the correspondence of these fathers' practices with workplace conditions, and we can assume that the correlation between the two practices and workplace conditions are not very different.

We expect the gradient of the correlation between parental leave use and workplace characteristics to vary depending on parental leave practice. For unrestrained practice and right-using practice, i.e., fathers only using father's leave, there is no necessity for mothers to adjust their use of parental leave. Mothers' willingness to share some of the parental leave, influenced by cost of absence, is only challenged between partners when fathers use a portion of their common leave, required for the limit-setting practice. For this reason, we expect a mother's workplace characteristics to have a stronger influence on parental leave practice involving sharing of common leave than on parental leave practice where the father only uses father's leave.

## **Data**

The data were derived from Norwegian population registers and comprise demographic information on all co-residing couples that had their first or second common child in the period 1996–2003. The demographic data have been combined with information on related parental leave use, which was made available by the Norwegian Labour and Welfare Organisation (NAV). Information on workplace characteristics of mothers' and fathers' workplaces is from the Norwegian business register, and information on earned income and educational attainment has been added from the Norwegian tax and educational registers. The study population covers only couples for whom at least the mother has used parental leave, which means that she has been participating in the labour market prior to giving birth. Couples are also censored because of multiple births, since such couples have the opportunity to take



longer leave than those who have single births, and thus are not completely comparable. The dataset thereby comprises 109 895 one-child couples and 89 606 two-child couples.

## Methods

The response variable for the analysis is couples' parental leave use in the year following childbirth, and is defined in three categories. These are: "No use" (N)—the mothers took maximum parental leave and the father none, "Father's leave" (F)—the mothers took maximum parental leave and the father took father's leave, and "Long leave" (L)—the couple shared the common parental leave. This means that the mother shortened her leave compared with those who took the maximum, and the father took leave in addition to father's leave. This means that we have a multcategory response variable, and for this we used a multcategory logit model that can be expressed as

$$\pi_j = \frac{\exp(\alpha_j + \beta_j x)}{\sum_j \exp(\alpha_j + \beta_j x)}$$

where  $j = 1, \dots, J - 1$ .

The denominator is the same for each probability, and the numerators for various  $j$  sum to the denominator, so  $\sum_j \pi_j = 1$ . The parameters equal zero for whichever category is the baseline in the logit expression. Here, we have used the category (N) as the baseline, which are couples in which the father has not used any parental leave. We thereby estimate the probability of (F) versus (N), and the probability of (L) in contrast to (N) in the same model. The estimates are expressed in terms of relative risk for the various categories of our variables. For instance, for the probability of the outcome (F) relative to the baseline category (N), a value greater than 1 indicates that probability is higher than the reference category of the same variable. A value of less than 1 indicates a reduced probability of outcome (F) relative to the baseline category (N) when the effects of the other covariates of the model are held constant.

## Classification of independent variables

Frequencies of the study population of one- and two-child couples are presented in Table 1.

Workplace characteristics were assessed for the year before childbirth based on three different conditions. *Sector affiliation* of the workplace is defined as the dichotomy of private–public. *Gender division* of the workplace was categorized as male-dominated (70–100 per cent male employees), female-dominated (70–100 per cent female employees), and neutral (31–69 per cent female or male

employees). *Workplace size* was divided into three categories; small (1–19 employees), medium (20–99 employees), and large (100 or more employees).

*Education* was assessed in the year prior to childbirth, and the education level of parents allocated to one of three categories: low (primary or lower secondary level), medium (secondary level), and high (tertiary education). Income from work (before tax) was also taken from the year prior to childbirth. *Income differences* between mother and father (the relative proportions of mother's and father's earned income) were used to capture the gender balance of economic resources between a couple. Couples were divided into five groups according to mother's earnings as a proportion of the father's earned income: 0–25, 26–50, 51–75, 76–100 per cent of the father's earned income, and mothers who earned more than the fathers. In the models, we also controlled for mother's age at childbirth, age differences between the couple and whether the couple are married or not.

**Table 1. Characteristics of study population of one- and two-child couples. Per cent**

	One-child couples	Two-child couples
<b>Parental leave use</b>		
No use (N)	27.2	26.9
Father's leave (F)	63.7	64.9
Long leave (L)	9.1	8.2
<b>Sector affiliation</b>		
Both public	7.7	9.0
Mother public–Father private	23.4	25.6
Mother private–Father public	5.6	5.6
Both private	50.5	47.3
<b>Gender division</b>		
Both male-dom.	9.2	8.4
Mother male-dom.–Father neutral	3.1	3.0
Mother male-dom.–Father female-dom.	0.7	0.7
Mother neutral–Father male-dom.	16.9	16.6
Both neutral	12.7	12.3
Mother neutral–Father female-dom.	2.8	2.6
Mother female-dom.–Father male-dom.	28.1	29.0
Mother female-dom.–Father neutral	12.4	13.0
Both female-dom.	5.9	6.0
<b>Workplace size</b>		
Both small	18.4	18.4
Mother small–Father medium	10.9	11.0
Mother small–Father large	8.2	8.3
Mother medium–Father small	11.9	11.8
Both medium	10.0	10.2
Mother medium–Father large	6.8	7.3
Mother large–Father small	8.7	8.6
Mother large–Father medium	6.7	6.9
Both large	9.2	9.1
<b>Education</b>		
Both low	5.2	4.5
Mother low–Father medium	8.3	7.4
Mother low–Father high	1.5	1.4
Mother medium–Father low	8.9	8.7
Both medium	24.4	25.6
Mother medium–Father high	7.4	7.7
Mother high–Father low	3.2	3.2
Mother high–Father medium	14.6	14.8
Both high	22.3	24.5
<b>Income differences</b>		
0–25%	5.2	7.8
26–50%	15.4	22.5
51–75%	26.0	29.7
76–100%	24.4	20.6
above 100%	25.6	17.3
	109 895	89 606

## Results

In Table 2, we present the estimated results for one-child couples. The estimates show the relative risk of belonging to either the “Father’s leave” group—i.e., the mothers used maximum parental leave and fathers the father’s leave—or the “Long leave” group, i.e., the couple has shared the common parental leave. This means that the mother shortened her paid leave compared with those taking the maximum, and the father has taken leave in addition to father’s leave. Both sets of estimates show the relative risk compared to the “No use” group, i.e., mothers have used maximum parental leave and the fathers none. We show variations according to three workplace characteristics: sector affiliation, gender division and workplace size. We have constructed two models: Model I, which controls for demographic variables (mother’s age at childbirth, the age differences between the couple and whether or not the couple are married), and Model II, which in addition controls for socioeconomic characteristics (educational level, mother’s and father’s income and income differences between the couple). It is useful to show results from both models, because changes in the estimates after controlling for socioeconomic characteristics indicate that these factors can be used to explain differences in workplace characteristics. The estimated results for socioeconomic variables are presented in Table 3.

The general picture among one-child couples is that there is much more variation in couples’ workplace characteristics among the “Long leave” group than among the “Father’s leave” group. The reported estimates show several interesting differences between different workplace characteristics in both groups that need to be elaborated. We start by discussing the estimates of work characteristics among couples belonging to the “Father’s leave” group. First, for sector affiliation there are only significant differences between couples where the mother works in the private sector, the father in the public sector and for couples where both partners work in the public sector. After controlling for socioeconomic characteristics, the difference disappears. Second, there are significant differences according to gender division in the workplace, but only before controlling for socioeconomic characteristics. The general pattern is that couples in which the mother works in female-dominated workplaces are more likely than couples where both work in male-dominated workplaces to belong to the “Father’s leave” than the “No use” group. Third, there are significant differences according to workplace size when socioeconomic characteristics are controlled for. The combination where the father works in a medium-sized workplace and the mother in either a small or medium-sized workplace has a positive effect on the relative risk of couples belonging to the “Father’s leave” group. Any other combination has a negative effect.

**Table 2. The relative risk of one-child couples belonging to the “Father’s leave” rather than “No use” group, and the relative risk of belonging to the “Long leave” versus “No use” group, according to workplace characteristics**

Workplace characteristics	Father’s leave/No use		Long leave/No use	
	Model I <sup>1</sup>	Model II <sup>2</sup>	Model I <sup>1</sup>	Model II <sup>2</sup>
<b>Sector affiliation</b>				
Both public	1	1	1	1
Mother public–Father private	1.03 ns	1.06 ns	0.72	0.85
Mother private–Father public	0.86	0.92 ns	0.74	0.89 ns
Both private	0.95 ns	1.00 ns	0.62	0.84
<b>Gender division</b>				
Both male-dom.	1	1	1	1
Mother male-dom.–Father neutral	1.07 ns	1.08 ns	1.08 ns	0.98 ns
Mother male-dom.–Father female-dom.	0.94 ns	1.11 ns	0.90 ns	0.98 ns
Mother neutral–Father male-dom.	0.98 ns	1.02 ns	0.82	0.87
Both neutral	1.00 ns	1.03 ns	1.04 ns	0.98 ns
Mother neutral–Father female-dom.	0.88	0.99 ns	0.82	0.84
Mother female-dom.–Father male-dom.	0.95 ns	1.02 ns	0.58	0.69
Mother female-dom.–Father neutral	0.93	0.99 ns	0.67	0.70
Both female-dom.	0.89	0.98 ns	0.70	0.74
<b>Workplace size</b>				
Both small	1	1	1	1
Mother small–Father medium	1.15	1.11	1.33	1.27
Mother small–Father large	1.00 ns	0.91	1.27	1.11
Mother medium–Father small	0.95 ns	0.92	0.96 ns	0.87
Both medium	1.22	1.12	1.32	1.14
Mother medium–Father large	1.02 ns	0.89	1.36	1.07 ns
Mother large–Father small	0.96	0.90	0.99 ns	0.82
Mother large–Father medium	1.20	1.06 ns	1.56	1.20
Both large	1.03 ns	0.84	1.74	1.21

Note: <sup>1</sup> Model I controls for demographic variables (mother’s age at childbirth, the age differences between the couple and whether the couple are married or not). <sup>2</sup> Model II controls for demographic variables (mother’s age at childbirth, the age differences between the couple and whether the couple is married or not), and socioeconomic characteristics (educational level, mother’s and father’s income and income difference between the couple). ns = not significant at 0.001 level.

**Table 3. The relative risk of one-child couples belonging to the “Father’s leave” versus the “No use” group, and the relative risk of belonging to the “Long leave” versus the “No use” group, according to socioeconomic characteristics**

Socioeconomic VAR	Father’s leave/No use	Long leave/No use
<b>Education</b>		
Both low	1	1
Mother low–Father medium	1.52	1.50
Mother low–Father high	1.58	1.19 ns
Mother medium–Father low	1.42	1.32
Both medium	1.82	1.84
Mother medium–Father high	1.92	2.05
Mother high–Father low	1.60	2.43
Mother high–Father medium	1.95	2.96
Both high	1.96	4.12
<b>Income differences</b>		
0–25%	1	1
26–50%	1.92	1.30
51–75%	2.81	1.87
76–100%	3.40	2.75
above 100%	1.61	1.27

Note: Estimates from Model II include workplace characteristics (reported in Table 2) and controls for demographic variables (mother’s age at childbirth, the age differences in the couple and whether the couple is married or not). ns = not significant at 0.001 level.

The estimated results thereby show that there is little variation according to couples’ workplace characteristics on whether one-child couples belong to the “Father’s leave” rather than the “No use” group. Differences in sector affiliation and gender division at the workplace can be explained by differences in socioeconomic characteristics. Workplace size seems to be an important factor, and couples in which fathers work in medium-sized workplaces are more likely to belong to the “Father’s leave” than the “No use” group relative to other couples. Medium-sized workplaces are categorized as workplaces where there are between 20 and 99 employees. It can be argued that it might be easier for the fathers to take a break from work when working at a workplace with many colleagues compared with small workplaces. It is therefore somewhat puzzling that among couples where the father works in large workplaces, there is less chance of fathers taking father’s leave than if both parents work in small workplaces. One interesting question is whether there are more normative expectations for parental leave use in medium-sized workplaces than in larger workplaces, and it is thus easier to follow one’s own preferences.

We now discuss the estimates of work characteristics for couples who belong to the “Long leave” group. First, the estimates for sector affiliation show that the relative risk of belonging to

this group is highest among couples in which both work in the public sector, and lowest when both work in the private sector. This is still sufficient after controlling for socioeconomic characteristics, but the differences are smaller. There are, however, no significant variations between couples in which one partner works in the private and the other in the public sector. Second, the estimates for gender divisions in workplaces show that the highest relative risk of fathers taking more common leave than father's leave is found among couples where both partners work in male-dominated workplaces, and the lowest risk is among couples where the mother works in a female-dominated workplace. Third, the estimates for workplace size show that there is higher relative risk of fathers taking long leave among all couples where the father does not work in a small workplace. The reported estimates for one-child couples belonging to the "Long leave" and "No use" groups show that there are more variations in couples' workplace characteristics than in the "Father's leave" group. Workplace characteristics that seem to have the strongest positive effect on fathers taking more common leave than father's leave are the combinations of both parents working in the public sector, both working in male-dominated workplaces and in medium-sized or large workplaces.

Now we turn to the estimated results for two-child couples (Table 4). The estimated results for the socioeconomic variables are presented in Table 5. Here we see the same general pattern as among one-child couples. First, in terms of sector affiliation, there are considerable differences in the relative risk of belonging to the "Long leave" group before controlling for socioeconomic characteristics. After controlling for education and income, there is still a significant difference between couples that both partners work in the private sector or both work in the public sector, although the effects are substantially smaller. This indicates that many of the differences between the private and public sectors are explained by differences in socioeconomic characteristics. It is important to underline that there *are* significant differences in sector affiliation, but educational and income differences among couples working in the two sectors influence these differences. Our findings for both one- and two-child couples thus support our assumption that the public sector has a strong influence on parents' parental leave use. Second, for gender division at the workplace, we see that combinations involving mothers working in female-dominated workplaces have a negative effect on whether fathers take leave. For members of the "Father's leave" group, this is only true when we do not control for socioeconomic characteristics, but for membership of the "Long leave" group the results are still present after controlling for these factors.

**Table 4. The relative risk of two-child couples belonging to the “Father’s leave” rather than “No use” group, and the relative risk of belonging to the “Long leave” versus “No use” group, according to workplace characteristics**

Workplace characteristics	Father’s leave/No use		Long leave/No use	
	Model I <sup>1</sup>	Model II <sup>2</sup>	Model I <sup>1</sup>	Model II <sup>2</sup>
<b>Sector affiliation</b>				
Both public	1	1	1	1
Mother public–Father private	1.01 ns	1.08 ns	0.67	0.90 ns
Mother private–Father public	0.89	0.99 ns	0.85	1.10 ns
Both private	0.93 ns	1.07 ns	0.55	0.88
<b>Gender division</b>				
Both male-dom.	1	1	1	1
Mother male-dom.–Father neutral	1.01 ns	1.00 ns	1.15 ns	1.00 ns
Mother male-dom.–Father female-dom.	0.98 ns	1.03 ns	0.87 ns	0.83 ns
Mother neutral–Father male-dom.	0.95 ns	0.98 ns	0.86	0.94 ns
Both neutral	0.96 ns	0.96 ns	1.15	1.06 ns
Mother neutral–Father female-dom.	0.97ns	1.05 ns	1.05 ns	1.03 ns
Mother female-dom.–Father male-dom.	0.91	0.95 ns	0.54	0.69
Mother female-dom.–Father neutral	0.92	0.94 ns	0.64	0.68
Both female-dom.	0.90	0.96 ns	0.72	0.73
<b>Workplace size</b>				
Both small	1	1	1	1
Mother small–Father medium	1.15	1.10	1.20	1.15
Mother small–Father large	0.92	0.87	1.12	1.04
Mother medium–Father small	0.96 ns	0.91	0.87	0.77
Both medium	1.09	1.01 ns	1.26	1.09 ns
Mother medium–Father large	0.93 ns	0.84	1.29	1.08 ns
Mother large–Father small	0.91	0.85	0.99 ns	0.80
Mother large–Father medium	1.17	1.05 ns	1.58	1.20
Both large	1.01 ns	0.90	1.66	1.25

Note: <sup>1</sup> Model I controls for demographic variables (mother’s age at childbirth, the age differences between the couple and whether the couple are married or not). <sup>2</sup> Model II controls for demographic variables (mother’s age at childbirth, the age differences between the couple and whether the couple is married or not), and socioeconomic characteristics (educational level, mother’s and father’s income and income difference between the couple). ns = not significant at 0.001 level.



**Table 5. The relative risk of two-child couples belonging to the “Father’s leave” versus the “No use” group, and the relative risk of belonging to the “Long leave” versus the “No use” group, according to socioeconomic characteristics**

Socioeconomic VAR	Father’s leave/No use	Long leave/No use
<b>Education</b>		
Both low	1	1
Mother low–Father medium	1.40	1.75
Mother low–Father high	1.58	1.96
Mother medium–Father low	1.31	1.61
Both medium	1.72	2.37
Mother medium–Father high	1.82	2.65
Mother high–Father low	1.60	2.29
Mother high–Father medium	2.00	3.66
Both high	2.01	6.00
<b>Income differences</b>		
0–25%	1	1
26–50%	1.73	1.34
51–75%	2.45	2.46
76–100%	2.61	2.66
above 100%	1.18	1.78

Note: Estimates from Model II include workplace characteristics (reported in Table 3) and controls for demographic variables (mother’s age at childbirth, the age differences in the couple and whether the couple is married or not). ns = not significant at 0.001 level.

We find support for our assumption that gender division at the mother’s workplace is more important than that of the father for parental leave practice. We do however find that when gender division in the father’s workplace has an influence, it is that fathers working in male-dominated workplaces are least likely to take long leave. Third, for workplace size there is the same pattern among two-child couples as among one-child couples, and our assumptions are confirmed. Small workplaces are most strongly associated with “No use” group membership, while large workplaces for fathers are more strongly associated with the “Long leave” than the “Father’s leave” group. In the latter group, there is a reduced risk of fathers taking father’s leave among couples where the father works in a large rather than small workplace.

## Conclusion

The analysis provides new insights about different parental leave practices and the association of these practices with variations in parents’ workplace characteristics. We are careful in claiming that our finding reflects any causal impact on different parental leave practices, as they may very well be a

result of selection into certain workplaces. That said, our conclusion is that parents' parental leave practices are associated by mothers' and fathers' workplace characteristics, but practices where fathers take long leave are most influenced by such factors. Parental leave practices that only involve fathers using father's leave have little influence on mothers' workplace characteristics. Such a practice does not involve 'negotiations' with the mother and her parental leave use, which means that her workplace situation is not included in the decision-making process. Many fathers following this practice would not take any leave days if the scheme did not offer them, which means that they might be very receptive to arguments against taking such leave. In their negotiations with workplaces, employees at small workplaces seem to be more vulnerable to pressure not to take father's leave. Parental leave practices that involve negotiations with the mother produce more variations in both mothers' and fathers' workplace characteristics. Couples in which both the mother and father work in the private sector, the mother works in a female-dominated workplace and the father in a small workplace are less likely to belong to the group where the father takes more common leave than father's leave.

It is clear that parents' parental leave use is a result of several concurrent processes. Reserving a portion of the leave for fathers provides them with an opportunity to participate in childcare in the early stages of their children's lives, and it challenges the traditional norms of fatherhood. From our results, we may conclude that the "Father's leave" practice has little limitations imposed by the parents' workplaces, with the exception of the size of the father's workplace. Although we should be careful in drawing too strong conclusions based on our limited knowledge about the parents' workplaces, our findings increase our knowledge about these processes. One objective of reserving a portion of leave for fathers was to motivate parents to share more of their leave. During the 15-year period in which father's leave has been in force, there has been an increase in the number of couples sharing more of their common leave, but mothers still take the lion's share of the leave. From our results, we may conclude that "Long leave" practice is partly linked to mothers' workplace situations; fathers with partners working in workplaces with little cost of long absences from work are less likely to take long leave than other fathers. There are both societal and individual attitudes in addition to preferences regarding leave entitlement. For many couples, parental leave is considered to be mother's leave, and the father is permitted to take as much leave as the mother allows (Magnussen et al., 2001). However, our results also lead us to conclude that "Long leave" practice is also linked to the father's own workplace situation, in which the size of the workplace plays an important role. An important insight of the analysis is thus that policies designed to structure parents' use of parental leave are indeed working, but limitations/opportunities/ norms in their workplace conditions create heterogeneity in parental leave practices.

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