

Encourage Fathers' Use of Paternal Leave in Vietnam: the Labor Contract Characteristics and Fathers' Behavior



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ABSTRACT: Vietnam reformed the maternity regime in 2014, in which male employees currently paying social insurance premiums whose wives give birth to children are entitled to a maternity leave of from 5 to 14 working days. This is widely regarded as a landmark reform that has shifted the Vietnam maternity regime toward a model that is more supportive of the compatibility of work and family life. In this paper, we show that fathers' leave-taking was only about 5,2% of total male employees currently paying social insurance premiums whose wives give birth, even when fathers are on leave period, they spend very little time with their children; despite drastic changes in gender norms in Vietnam, as well as short periods of leave, may have long-lasting effects on fathers' involvement in newborn care and housework. We also find that groups of fathers, who are cadres and civil servants, as well as those with permanent working contracts profited more strongly from changing their behavior, while self-employment and temporary work lower fathers' chances of taking leave. Finally, we make some compelling proposals to increase the number of fathers taking parental leave.

KEYWORDS: Fathers' leave-taking, labor contract, leave period, maternity regime, paternal leave.

I. INTRODUCTION

The objectives of social insurance reform in Vietnam are clearly "Reforming social insurance to turn social insurance into the core structure of social security system. Develop social insurance system in a flexible, diversified, multilayered. Enhance capacity and effectiveness of state management and implement social insurance policies concisely, professionally, modernly, effectively, reliably and transparently" (Resolution No. 28-NQ/TW 2018). To achieve this focus, the issue of paternal leave also needs to be explicitly considered, as fathers who take leave provide a wide range of benefits in terms of society, families, and the comprehensive development of the child.

Society, recognition of men's right to parenthood, as well as their responsibility to share childcare and household work, will help to break down traditional social attitudes, especially in Vietnamese society, where there is still the concept of respecting men more than women; resulting in greater equality for both men and women at work and at home. In workplace culture, the fathers' leave-taking will reduce discrimination in the workplace, particularly regarding hiring decisions to hire women of childbearing age, decreasing the gender pay gap, because usually women are paid less, on average, than their male counterparts (GSO Vietnam 2019).

Family, raising an infant is no mean task, it is a difficult task, especially for the newbie parents. Most fathers are not confident in their ability to take care of a newborn, and the birth mother of a newborn child often has more immediate and physical responsibilities to take care of the child. Fathers' leave-taking will redefine parenthood. The parental leave is a policy that is a milestone towards cultural change. It provides an opportunity for fathers to be more active in caring for their children and for mothers to restore health after giving birth as well as for mothers to have the opportunity of limiting the effect of caring responsibilities on their career.

The benefits of paternal leave are substantial for dads, kids, and marriages. Fathers are more satisfied with their jobs, reduce stress at work, have greater life satisfaction, and better physical. Paternal leave affects the evolution of household roles in the longer run, and these fathers are more likely to remain involved in their children's education in the future, and fathers who spend more time alone caring for their babies are less likely to separate from their partners. There are also issues around mother and child health after birth, mothers have lower parenting stress in the household and lower depression in their mothers. The fathers' leave-taking will make changes to the cultural perception of the dad still being the breadwinner of the family, issues around

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breastfeeding, and the nature of the type of housework mothers and fathers must be doing. A special discovery in Ziegler's recherche, infant mortality is reduced by as much as 10% when dads take parental leave (Ziegler & Bamieh 2023).

In this study, we looked at whether fathers were concerned about leave issues. Why is a very low percentage of fathers taking leave in Vietnam? and how they used this short time when they were on leave period. We also consider whether fathers who are cadres and civil servants or have long-term, stable work contracts (with labor contracts of 3 years or more) benefit more from the new parental leave than fathers in the private sector or on temporary contracts. Finally, we make some compelling proposals to increase the number of fathers taking parental leave. Previous studies on the maternity regime in Vietnam have hardly focused on this issue. However, in Europe, there have been many studies. For example, Geisler's & Kreyenfeld's (2012) research on "*How Policy Matters: Germany's Parental Leave Benefit Reform and Fathers' Behavior 1999 - 2009*". This study found a substantial overall increase in parental leave usage among men. Two groups of men changed their behavior: highly educated men and fathers on fixed-term employment contracts. Researched on Ziegler and Bamieh (2023). They used the changes to paid parental leave schemes in Austria to examine the importance of flexibility in leave duration and financial incentives on decisions to take paternity leave. This study showed that although parental leave policies increasingly encourage the involvement of both parents, only some fathers take time off work to take care of their children. Paternity leave might also increase fathers' involvement in childcare and household chores beyond the leave spell. Children benefit from paternity leave because the increased presence of the father improves their social, behavioral, and psychological outcomes and increases school performance. Paternal leave also positively affects the life satisfaction of both mothers and fathers.

II. RESEARCH OBJECTIVES AND METHODOLOGY

The main objective of this research into the make some compelling proposals to increase the number of fathers' leave-taking. To achieve the study objective, we use data from Vietnam Social Security for the period 2015 to 2022 to explore how this new policy has impacted fathers' use of parental leave. We find that only about 5.2% of fathers most of whom are in cadres and civil servants and with permanent working contracts apply for paternal leave out of the total male employees currently paying social insurance premiums whose wives have children. Simultaneously, we use the survey method; we also excluded the fathers who are willing to have their parents help when their wives give birth from the sample; because these men will not take leave when the wife gives birth. In addition, we also excluded the unemployed, and the small number of single fathers. The total sample size consisted of 2,000 respondents. Of these respondents, 1,000 fathers were on parental leave at the time of the interview, or there may be some fathers who have taken leave with a child, but because the time of leave was short, they might have already returned to work when the interview was conducted. The next 1,000 respondents do not choose to take time off work even when they are allowed leave because of reduced family income and job positions will not be stable.

III. RESULT

Our analysis strategy is a combination of paternal leave data provided by Vietnam Social Security and results of interviews with male employees paying social insurance whose wives have children. First, we give the Vietnam paternal leave system for the Law on Social Insurance. Second, we give the reality about the total of fathers taking leave in the period 2015 - 2022. Third, we investigated how the dads spend their leave-taking, next what were the reasons why fathers did not choose to take leave? In the fourth part, we use data from Vietnam Social Security to examine how employment contract characteristics have been shown to influence the decision to leave childcare.

A. The Vietnam father's leave period system

Paternal leave is generally a short period of leave for the father immediately following childbirth. It aims to enable fathers to assist the mother in recovering from childbirth, which is also crucial in establishing breastfeeding, taking care of the newborn as well as other family-related responsibilities (ILO 2014a). Vietnam introduced its father leave system in 2014. , male employees currently paying social insurance premiums whose wives give birth to children are entitled to a maternity leave of 5 working days; 7 working days, in case their wives undergo a surgical birth or give birth to children before 32 weeks of pregnancy; 10 working days, in case their wives give birth to twins; or additional 3 working days for each infant from the second; 14 working days, in case their wives give birth to twins or more infants and take childbirth operation. The maternity leave period must be within the first 30 days after the date of childbirth. (Law 58/2014/QH13 2014).

The maternity leave period of 14 working days or more in a month shall be regarded as a period of social insurance premium payment. During this period, employees and employers are not required to pay social insurance premiums (Circular 59/2015/TT-BLDTBXH 2015).

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The new parental leave scheme constitutes a significant reform for Vietnam Social Security. It is towards a model of the male breadwinner model. Fathers' leave, take-up of family responsibilities, breaking down cultural barriers, and early interaction with their children are directly related to successful child development. But do fathers really feel this policy is a very necessary problem for their families?

B. The current reality of fathers' leave-taking in Vietnam

Table I shows that male employees paying social insurance are entitled to a maternity regime. On average, only about 5.2% of fathers' leave-taking, not including in 2020 and 2021 has increased due to the impact of the Covid-19 epidemic. This proportion is much lower in Northern European countries, where men account for 20% of fathers going on leave (Ziegler & Bamieh 2023). In Germany is 34%, but most fathers' leave-taking decide to take exactly two months of paid leave and few families share paid leave equally between both parents (Huebener et al. 2016, Kluge & Schmitz 2018).

Table I: The proportion of fathers taking leave in the period 2015 - 2022

(Unit: People)

Targets Years	Total of Male Employees Paying Social Insurance Whose Wives Have Children	Total of Fathers' Leave-taking	Proportion (%)
2015	244,000	11,210	5.00
2016	226,500	12,030	5.31
2017	228,800	11,910	5.21
2018	250,560	12,780	5.10
2019	261,980	13,360	5.10
2020	277,500	14,990	5.40
2021	284,000	14,970	5.27
2022	294,600	15,320	5.20

(Source: Annual Reports of Vietnam Social Security)

Even though there are so many personal and broader benefits of taking parental leave, approximately 95% of Vietnam dads still don't take leave. Sadly there are many factors influencing dads against taking forms of leave. In our recent survey on "Why dads don't take leave", many fathers said that they did not know this paternal leave existed but if they are given leave-taking, they will not take it because the income of their family will be reduced. Fathers are entitled to leave, but cultural and economic pressures combine to discourage them from taking leave. Fathers who aren't brave enough to take parental leave don't really feel that there might be consequences once they return to work.

C. Fathers' behavior

1) Fathers' time dedicated to newborn:

In the survey, 2,000 fathers are shown a list of activities and are asked how many hours per day they spend on childcare, housework, and other activities. The list of activities includes: Newborn care, for the job (using a computer or not), housework (washing, cooking, cleaning) or repairs on the house appliances, care for other persons in need of care (including elderly parents who need care, the wife, and possibly their first child...), playing games and chatting, sports or hobbies free time activities.

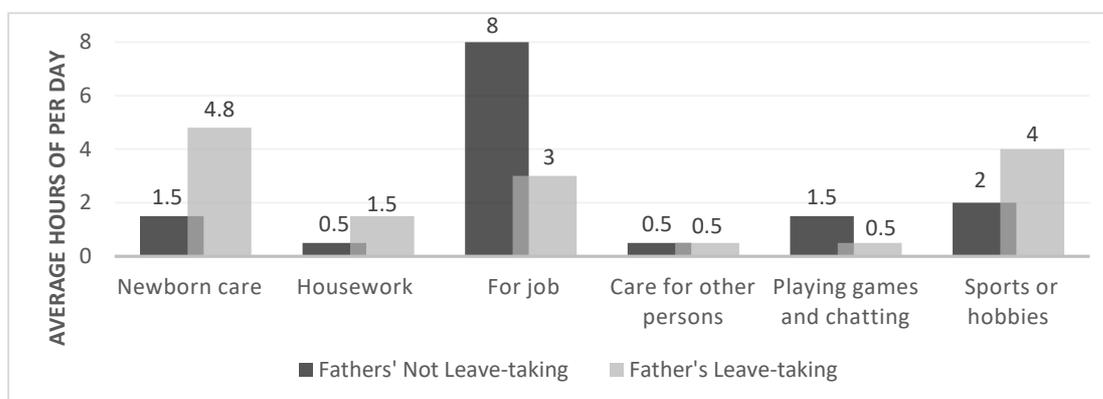


Figure 1: The average time to take care of children of fathers whose wife give birth

(Source: Summary from survey results)

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Figure 1 documents differences in fathers' time for childcare, housework, and errands by leave status. Fathers with parental leave are much more engaged in housework and childcare than fathers without leave. The fathers who do not take leave spend only 1.5 hours per day on newborn care, while fathers taking leave who take leave spend 4.8 hours. But compared with mothers' newborn care full-time, fathers' involvement is small. The housework of fathers taking leave is 1.5 hours per day and higher than 0.5 hours of fathers not taking leave. Although the fathers are said to have very little time to spend with their newborn, they still spend from 0.5 to 1.5 hours playing games or chatting and from 2 to 4 hours per day on sports or personal hobbies. A special thing is that, despite paternal leave the fathers still spend up to 3 hours a day at work. Compared to other activities this time is considered too much for a father on leave period. The fathers' parental leave-taking has a significant influence on the time fathers dedicate to newborns, leads to a reduction of gender differences in housework, and contributes to more gender equality in other household duties.

2) The reasons why dads don't take leave:

In the interview "Why dads don't take leave" a total of 1,000 fathers who did not choose to take leave were asked about 4 main reasons for not taking paternal leave: The family loss of income; the job characteristics and workplace culture; traditional masculinity and cultural pressure; personal doubts and other reasons, the results are presented in Figure 2.

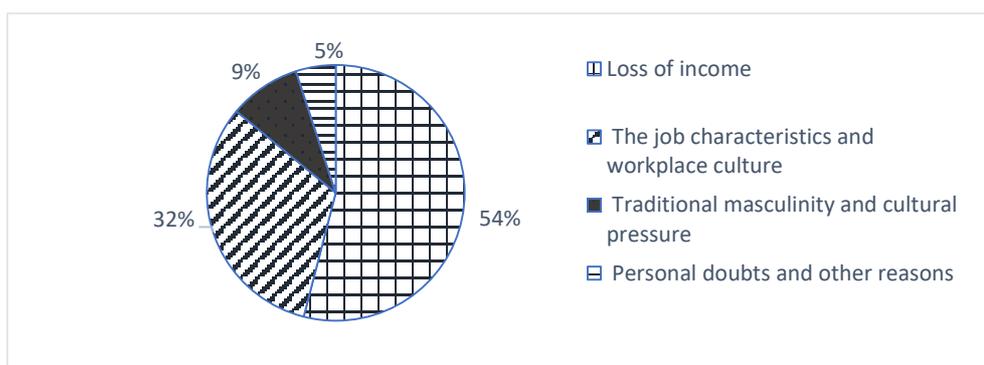


Figure 2: The proportion of reasons why dads don't take leave

(Source: Summary from survey results)

Reducing or income loss is a common concern for many fathers thinking about paternal leave, most families will have to make tough budgetary decisions to prepare for the time away from work. So of the men surveyed, 54% said they were reluctant to take leave because to do so would damage their families financially.

Many fathers worry that leave-taking will hurt their reputation at work with colleagues, job positions will not be stable, and risk the chance at a promotion. The survey found that 32% of fathers worry that taking paternity leave will negatively impact their relationship with their managers, they feared they'd be seen as less committed at work. The job characteristics and workplace culture have lost the father's opportunity to care for his newborn, as well as a workplace culture in Vietnam that does not encourage dads to take parental leave, even if parental leave is offered.

Despite drastic changes in gender norms in Vietnam, many still think of men as the strong type, it can be hard to reconcile that with changing a diaper or rocking a baby to sleep. It is because of cultural pressure that 9% of fathers are asked, they do not think about the best thing that fathers can do for their children which is to be with them as much as possible. And 5% of fathers doubt their ability to care before the child arrives, they don't know what to do in front of a newborn and it seems they feel like parental leave policies don't really apply to them.

D. The labor contract characteristics

We divide the labor contract characteristics into 2 main groups. The group includes the fathers with a long-term stable work contract (Cadres and civil servants and the labor contract 3 years or more) and the group the fathers in the private sector or on temporary contracts. Data in Table 2 provides the results by type of contract, although the proportion of male workers paying social insurance whose wives have children is almost equal in the two groups; However, the of fathers taking leave in the private sector or on temporary contracts is much less than in including the fathers with long-term stable work contract during the entire study period.

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Table II: The fathers taking leave are distributed according to labor contract characteristics

(Unit: People)

Targets Years	The Fathers with a Long-term Stable Work Contract			The Fathers in the Private Sector or on Temporary Contracts		
	Total of Fathers Who Have Wives Have Children	Fathers' Leave-taking	Proportion (%)	Total of Fathers Who Have Wives Have Children	Fathers' Leave-taking	Proportion (%)
2015	100,800	8,968	8.90	123,200	2,242	1.82
2016	107,588	9,504	8.83	118,913	2,526	2.12
2017	109,824	9,409	8.57	118,976	2,501	2.10
2018	121,522	9,968	8.20	129,038	2,812	2.18
2019	120,511	10,421	8.65	141,469	2,939	2.08
2020	127,650	11,842	9.28	149,850	3,148	2.10
2021	134,900	11,826	8.77	149,100	3,144	2.11
2022	141,408	12,256	8.67	153,192	3,064	2.00

(Source: Annual Reports of Vietnam Social Security)

Compared to men on permanent contracts, self-employed men and men on temporary working contracts are less likely to be on parental leave. The mean a stable job means a stable income, and fathers will have more conditions to take care of their children. The fathers in private sector employment often feared, probably with good reason, that their request to take leave would send a negative signal to their employers.

Table II also shows that the type of employment contract is an important determinant of a father's parental leave usage. The fathers with long-term stable work contracts were more likely than private sector employees to have taken leave (average of 9% versus 2% over the entire study period). The fathers on temporary working contracts are still more reluctant than fathers on permanent contracts to take parental leave. This result underlines that the labor contract characteristics remain a strong barrier to leave-taking.

IV. CONCLUSION

In this study we have shown that:

- The proportion of fathers' leave-taking when their wives give birth is very low.
- The fathers' leave-taking but they spend very little time with their newborn.
- The fathers with long-term, stable work contracts benefit more from the new paternal leave.

In order to increase the number of fathers taking paternal leave, we offer the following proposals:

About state management: Fathers are required to take leave when their wives give birth. This means dads don't have the option to take leave, they must stay home with the new baby. Which just sounds too bad, but "want equality? Make dads stay home". Sharing childcare is necessary and important, it has a lot of benefits for children, fathers, and significantly new mothers.

About the father's behavior: Propaganda and education so that fathers can spend more time with their newborns. because if a baby spends its early days with its dad it can have better cognitive development. Not only that, women whose husbands take leave in the early days of the infant are less likely to feel depressed. So the fathers need to change their perception and remove cultural pressure, taking at least one week for a leave period and experiencing the bliss of fatherhood firsthand.

About society and employers: It is not allowed to fire employees who have children, especially fathers working in the private sector or on temporary contracts. Even pay extra for fathers on parental leave, that's what companies should do. This gives them peace of mind and freedom from economic pressure when fathers take leave.

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