

Fathers' sense of entitlement to ear-marked and shared parental leave

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ABSTRACT

In most countries, parental leave systems consist of several parts with different lengths for fathers and/or mothers. This article compares fathers' sense of entitlement to two parts of the Norwegian parental leave system that are available to them, namely the individual, non-transferable fathers' quota of ten weeks and the shared parental leave of 26/36 weeks. The objective is to gain knowledge of the rationale for fathers' different take-ups of the two types of leave. Analysis of interviews with 22 fathers shows culturally divergent understandings of the two types of leave among fathers. Using the concept of 'entitlement' as theoretical lens, we find that fathers feel entitled to the fathers' quota based on gender equality norms in working life and the wider society. Fathers do to a much smaller degree feel entitled to the shared parental leave, which is culturally understood as mothers' entitlement. This understanding is, however, challenged by some fathers' claim to the shared leave on the basis of their being competent parents.

INTRODUCTION

There is an increased interest in policies to support working fathers and their ability to reconcile work and family. Parental leave is one of the main solutions in this respect. This article explores fathers' attitudes toward and experiences with parental leave within the Norwegian institutional context. In Norway, as in many other European countries, parental leave consists of several parts, which are individual and family-based rights (see Blum et al., 2017). Shared parental leave is a family right available to both mothers and fathers, being

gender neutral in character. The father- and mother-specific quotas are ear-marked, non-transferable rights and thus inherently gendered. We investigated whether fathers' use of and attitudes toward these two types of leave differ.

In their analysis of what is needed to achieve "strong gender equality" in family and working life, Brighthouse and Wright (2008) distinguish between policies that promote equality and those that enable it. As they see it, shared parental leave granted to the family enables parents to adopt egalitarian strategies, but puts no pressure on fathers to use them. Leave policies that promote equality are exemplified by paid leave granted to individual parents, which lapses if it is not used. Brighthouse and Wright find that type of leave necessary for breaking down the cultural barriers to gender equality in family and working life. Likewise, Morgan (2008) contends that shared leave is a 'partial reform' in the development towards gender equality. Partial reforms may be helpful to parents' work-life balance and bring some progress towards equality, but they may also reinforce a traditional division of labour between mothers and fathers. If the objective is greater equity in terms of the dual-earner/dual-caregiver model, the fathers' quota represents a full embrace of this model (Morgan 2008).

The international literature on specific policy provisions for parental leave is expanding (McKay and Doucet, 2010), particularly concerning fathers. Within research based on Nordic experiences, there is a consensus that parental leave rights given to individuals, rather than to families, are most likely to get fathers to take leave (Rostgaard, 2002; Duvander and Lammi-Taskula, 2011; Kvande and Brandth, 2017a; Haas and Rostgaard, 2011; Eydal et al., 2015). The father's quota in Nordic countries has been successful in involving fathers in taking care of their young babies (Haas and Rostgaard, 2011; Brandth and Kvande, 2013). These results are also found internationally (Moss and Kamerman, 2009; Gornick and Myers, 2009; Miller 2013). Fathers taking leave challenge the traditional gender norm that mothers are the primary caregivers of small children.

In contrast to individual, non-transferable rights for fathers, research from many countries without father-specific leave policies reports that shared parental leave is seldom taken by fathers (Geisler and Kreyenfeld, 2011; Dearing, 2016; Kaufman, 2018). Explanations have included global economic instability (O'Brien, 2013), workplace conditions, job insecurity (Romero-Balsas et al., 2013), policy limitations such as inadequate payment (Moss and Kamerman, 2009), gender dynamics including prevailing ideas of

masculinity and femininity (Schmidt et al., 2015; Valarino and Gauthier, 2016) and the moral obligations of motherhood and fatherhood (Lammi-Taskula, 2008). Mothers tend to take the leave that parents can divide however they wish, as men are not expected to take longer leaves (Neuman and Meuser, 2017). Looking at what facilitates or hinders fathers from taking parental leave in Canada, McKay and Doucet (2010) point to three arguments: mothers' preferences, including breastfeeding; specific policy provisions, particularly the duration and non-transferability of parental leave; and ideological and social norms at workplaces and communities. In this analysis of how parental leaves are understood in a Norwegian context, policy provisions and moral understandings of motherhood and fatherhood in workplaces are central issues.

The contemporary contexts for fathers to become caregivers are complex, contradictory and dependent on country-specific models of welfare policy, work life traditions and legislative provisions. Policy provisions have consequences for societal ideas of men and women's capabilities and entitlements. In earlier publications we have explored the institutional and design characteristics of the fathers' quota in order to understand its high rate of utilization (Brandth and Kvande, 2001; 2012). In this article we contrast and compare fathers' experiences with and attitudes concerning shared and earmarked parental leave. How do the different policy characteristics and norms regarding parental care influence fathers' use of and attitudes toward the two leaves?

After we describe the Norwegian context for parental leaves and present the theoretical perspective and methods of this study, we discuss the empirical results in two parts. The first explores fathers' sense of entitlement to the fathers' quota, emphasizing workplace culture and norms. In the second, we focus on fathers' sense of entitlement to shared parental leave when it is confronted with the moral obligations of motherhood and workplace norms.

NORWEGIAN PARENTAL LEAVE POLICY FOR FATHERS

In 1978 the leave rights in Norway were changed so that most of the leave could be shared between the parents, moving away from the idea of maternity leave as a special right for women. By granting fathers the right to shared leave, legislation signaled a new view of men's responsibilities and participation in caregiving. In the years to come, shared parental

leave was rarely used by fathers, however, so the policy did not promote more equal parenting. To advance that goal, an earmarked, non-transferable leave of four weeks for fathers was introduced in 1993. At the same time the total leave period was extended from 35 to 42 weeks with 100 per cent wage compensation. Proponents argued that a quota would give a strong signal to parents as well as to employers that men as well as women are parents with obligations and rights as caregivers. Children's need for their fathers was also emphasized in the debate. Since then the father's quota has developed gradually, extended to 14 weeks, then reduced to 10 weeks in 2014 following the politics of the parties in power, and extended to 15 weeks in 2018.

Both mothers and fathers have individual, non-transferable rights of equal length in addition to shared rights. Mothers have three extra weeks to be taken before the child's birth. From 2018, 16 weeks are sharable between mothers and fathers. If the parents choose lower pay (80% of wages), this leave is extended by 10 weeks. In addition to parental leave, fathers have two weeks of paternity leave to be taken after the birth of the child to assist the mother. There are no public records of the usage of paternity leave, as wage compensation is based on collective agreements and paid by employers.

To provide parental care in the home during the child's first year, is a strong parenting norm in Norway. 'More time for children' translates into home-based care until the child is one year old. From the second year, when parental leave has ended, institutional care is accepted as the 'ideal' form of childcare while parents are at work (Ellingsæter, 2016). The fathers' quota gives male employees the right and obligation to provide such care. For fathers to opt out of the leave would thus go against this norm as the quota would be forfeited. Another principal aim of father-specific leave is to break away from the norm that men serve as breadwinners and women as caregivers. This also emphasizes children's right to care from both parents. Today, gender equality in terms of the dual earner/dual carer model is advocated by the political parties in Norway and practiced by both parents taking parental leave (Ellingsæter, 2016).

The parental leave system is based on the principle that parents "earn" the right through participation in working life. To qualify for parental leave, both mothers and fathers have to be in the workforce for six of the last ten months prior to the birth. If the mother is not eligible, the father loses his right to the fathers' quota but not to the shared leave if the mother returns to studies or takes on employment. This type of eligibility encourages both

parents to combine work and family obligations as it is built on a model in which both mothers and fathers are employed.

Since its introduction, the fathers' quota has been widely used, and more than 90 per cent of eligible fathers use all or part of this leave (Kitterød et al., 2017). Mothers take most of the shared leave days and in most couples mothers' leave is considerably longer than fathers'.

THEORY: SENSE OF ENTITLEMENT

In exploring fathers' understandings of these two types of parental leave, we have chosen the theoretical concept of "entitlement" as our theoretical lens. This concept is developed by Suzan Lewis (Lewis, 1997; Lewis and Smithson, 2001) to explain differences in expectations of support from the state or the employer for the reconciliation of work and family life. She argues that "for work-family needs to be translated into demands for and take up of supportive policies there has to be a sense of entitlement" (Lewis, 1997, p. 15). The concept stems from social justice theory and denotes beliefs or feelings about having rights to something based on what is understood as fair and equitable (Major, 1993; Lewis and Smithson, 2001). It may concern the right to a benefit specified by law or agreements if some required qualifications are met but, as Lewis and Lewis (1997) point out, a sense of entitlement may also reflect less objective considerations. Formal rights alone do not ensure that employees regard themselves, or are regarded by others, as entitled. Subjective meanings that parents attach to work-family policies also influence what they perceive as fair or unfair.

The sense of entitlement to work-family support is therefore highly context dependent. It differs between countries and welfare states, which often have very different types of family policies and working life regulations. It also differs within countries between organizations, whose support for these policies varies. The Nordic welfare states, whose policies have shifted away from the male-breadwinner/female-caregiver model and instead expect all adults to be both breadwinners and carers, may lead to a different sense of entitlement than other countries whose policies are more asymmetrical.

According to the entitlement perspective, sense of entitlement is also affected by wider social values. People make care decisions based on moral and socially negotiated views about proper behavior. What parents may feel entitled to is embedded in normative

understandings of appropriate parenthood. Entitlement is conditioned by conceptions of ‘good motherhood’ and ‘fatherhood’ as mothers and fathers consider others’ assessments. Gender differences in parents’ sense of entitlement result from societal norms regarding women's and men's roles within the family (Major 1993). It has been pointed out that women and men experience a different sense of entitlement when it comes to work and family; fathers may lack a sense of entitlement regarding family support, while women may lack a sense of entitlement regarding career development, including pay (Lewis, 1997; Lewis and Smithson, 2001; Gatrell and Cooper, 2016).

The expectations in working life that employees should live up to the norm of the “ideal worker” may limit the family support that organizations offer to men. In neoliberal economies, employment has been increasingly characterized by competitiveness, long hours, and a requirement that employees be available during the evening and on weekends, exacerbating the imbalance between paid work and family life. Policies, however, have the capacity to reduce this imbalance and empower employees. In this context, we must explore gendered moral rationales and social norms regarding work.

There is considerable evidence that fathers are becoming more involved in caring. Even though as a group fathers have a low sense of entitlement to work-family support, studies documenting a change in fathers’ caregiving practices towards more involvement and responsibility have proliferated recently, showing a development which is paralleled by increased state support for men’s rights to parental leave (Eydal and Rostgaard, 2016; Wall and O’Brien, 2017). There are strong reasons to believe that this development implies a nascent shift among fathers regarding their sense of entitlement to support for caregiving (Gatrell and Cooper, 2016). This shift is particularly relevant in the Nordic countries where achieving equality between men and women is an important goal, and where international observers have been impressed by how public policies seem to facilitate a more equal division of work and caregiving (Gornick and Meyers, 2009; Lister, 2009).

The project investigated fathers’ different senses of entitlement concerning individual and shared parental leave. We explore how fathers who have used parental leave understand their entitlement to leave by focusing on social comparisons with those whom they assume are similar to or different from themselves, including mothers, other fathers, and colleagues and managers at work.

DATA AND METHOD

The analysis is based on a qualitative study in which 40 fathers who had taken parental leave were interviewed. About half the sample consisted of immigrant men. For the purpose of the analysis in this article, we have analysed the data from 22 native-born fathers in order to assess the Norwegian context of gender equality norms.

The interviews were carried out during the second year after the child's birth. Thus, the fathers in the sample had rights to 10 and 12 weeks of individual leave and 27 or 26 weeks of shared leave if they chose 100 percent compensation. The fathers were recruited by contact with various workplaces and then snowballing. The interviewees had to have become fathers after the fathers' quota was expanded to ten weeks in 2009, as we were interested in their experiences of relatively long leaves. The length of the leave taken by the sample varied; most fathers had taken the father's quota of 10 or 12 weeks, but eight (36 percent) had also taken all or part of the shared parental leave. Two of them had taken all the shared parental leave available, as the mothers were not eligible.

We endeavoured to find interviewees with varied social backgrounds. Half had higher education (masters' level), while the other half either had a medium level education at the bachelor level (6) or no education beyond high school (5). The fathers had a wide range of occupations, including engineers, artisans, teachers, office workers, consultants, and administrative, healthcare, and technical staff. They worked in organizations of various sizes and composition.

As Norwegian leave rights are employment based, i.e., accrued by the participation of both parents in working life, all the fathers and most mothers (except for three) were in paid employment prior to the birth of their child and had a right to parental leave. Half of the fathers were employed by private companies, but only one was self-employed, and one, a student, was temporarily employed. Except for this father, all worked full time. All the fathers lived together with the mother and the child. At the time of the interview, the child was between one and three years of age, and the child who triggered the interview could be the father's first, second or third child. Most fathers were in their thirties, though they ranged between 27 and 43.

The interviews were semi-structured and lasted between one and two hours. To preserve anonymity, the full name and contact details of the interviewees were not recorded, and fictitious names have been used. The fathers were generally interviewed in their homes,

but some interviews took place in a café or at their office. The fathers' experience with the leave was recent, and their understandings were based on both what they observed and what they experienced themselves.

We examined each transcript in order to identify the father's understanding of how shared parental leave and the fathers' quota functioned in the gendered field of childcare. Each transcript was first examined to identify themes in the ways fathers related to the two types of parental leave rights available to them. Several themes that are connected with the parental leave literature emerged in this descriptive stage. While focusing on clear themes, we also paid attention to the different views of the interviewees, highlighting positive as well as negative cases. In the next stage of analysis, we interpreted these themes in light of the entitlement perspective. The findings are illustrated by quotations; they are not representative of the whole sample, but show how fathers' sense of entitlement may work in explaining their different uses of the two types of leave.

SENSE OF ENTITLEMENT TO THE FATHERS' QUOTA

This analysis focuses first on the fathers' quota, which enjoys a high degree of support among fathers in Norway (Hamre, 2017).

The fathers' quota as a norm

Studies on fathers' quota usage have pointed out that it has become a norm among men in Norway to take leave when they have become fathers (Halrynjo and Kitterød, 2016; Naz 2010). Our findings support this claim.

“There was no doubt that I should take the fathers' quota”, said Steinar, an engineer with two daughters. According to Ivar, “For fathers to have 12 weeks is quite natural in a way.... It has become incorporated”. Their viewpoints illustrate that the fathers' quota is a matter of fact. Twenty-five years after it was introduced, taking leave seems to be taken for granted among fathers in Norway. That it is based in law, earmarked and non-transferable identifies this leave with fathers and defines it as their right and ‘property’.

It is also interpreted as an obligation and seen as a signal from the welfare state that fathers are expected to engage in taking care of small children. “Society reacts if you don't take it, right”, Harold said. Lars, an engineer, claimed that the quota “feels like something

you ought to ... that it's something you should take, really.... It feels like there's pressure on you to take it. That ... if you want to be a good parent, or a good father, then you have to take the daddy leave.” Several fathers indicated that if they had not taken the fathers’ quota, they would have to explain themselves to others.

A strong sense of entitlement to leave is supported by social norms of good fatherhood that these fathers seem to have incorporated into their identities. As the next section shows, fatherhood has also been incorporated into their practices as employees.

Employers’ support of fathers’ caregiving responsibilities

Many of the fathers in the sample strongly felt that having a quota given to them as employees was an unconditional strength in relation to work, and that it would have been much more difficult to gain support from employers if it were not for their legal right to the fathers’ leave. “It makes your position stronger when the quota is based in law”, said Geir. Kristoffer and many others believed that if the father's quota was not retained as a father-specific right, they would fail in their negotiations over leave with their employer. Since the fathers’ quota is statutory, employers have little leeway to adopt discriminatory practices.

The fathers’ sense of entitlement becomes explicit when Steinar reflects on how he would have had to argue in his previous job as a consulting engineer with a small company. “It was very intense with a call on us to work eighty hours a week and perform all we could with lots of pressure and bonuses. In this place, taking leave would have been frowned upon. But still, should you have to fight for your rights?” Moreover, the fathers’ leave is paid by the state rather than the employer. Comparing his right to the fathers’ quota with his right to paid holidays, Steinar said that if he did not take his “three months ‘holiday’ with pay”, he would lose it. Entitlements to paid time off are acceptable in working life. To have to argue with his employer about his childcare responsibilities would not work as well, Steinar claimed.

None of the fathers in the study reported that they had experienced any serious problems with their current employers when planning to use their entitlement (Brandth and Kvande, 2017). Indeed, men seem to be expected to take the fathers’ leave by their employers and colleagues. Harold, a schoolteacher, said: “It was all right, and it was expected! It would have been more of an issue if I hadn’t taken it. Public workplaces have to play by the rules.” For fathers it seems inevitable that working life must adapt to the regulations of the welfare state. Christian, a senior advisor in the municipal administration, pointed out that even though

the fathers' quota might sometimes represent challenges for workplaces, organizations do adapt to this legislation.

The fathers' quota has existed for a quarter century, which means that men who have advanced to management positions in organizations have taken fathers' leave themselves. That experience influences what is considered fair and feasible. Tore, a doctor in a large hospital, described how his leave-taking was received by his director, a 60-year-old chief physician: "He is updated on the father's quota.... He has had young children himself.... And I am not the first father to be in this situation." Steinar, too, explained that his bosses are fathers: "They are 54 and 62, and both were home with their children at a time when it was much less common than now. So they pushed me, saying 'Steinar, it is clear that you must stay home' and 'Are you sure you won't take a bit longer leave?' They said so even if it was bad for the job". Likewise, Sivert described his boss as very positive: "He understood me very well. I suppose he is 50 years, so he is very up to date." His boss was eager to help him find out about the regulations concerning the father's quota and the rest of the parental leave system. Sivert considered him a "modern" man who regarded fathers' involvement with children as important. Hans said:

I think most employers today live in the modern world and understand that they must live up to that. This is how it is. They need employees who are happy with their job and have a good family life. Now, we see that both managers and middle managers in companies, 35 to 40 years old, experience the same tensions concerning career, childcare, parental leaves and work hours. I have a mate who is manager of marketing, only a few years older than me in a top job; he had four months daddy leave, so that says a lot.

Fathers are more likely to take up family friendly working practices if they can "compare themselves with other fathers and realize that it is feasible to do so" (Lewis and Stumbitz, 2017:230). The fathers we interviewed reported that as leave takers they did not stand out in any way. Hans, a communications advisor in a transport company, told us that at his workplace "many of my male colleagues had a child at about the same time as me, which was great! We were about three or four who had kids within a two or three month span. In addition, many employees here have small children." The norms that are produced by these practices make it easy for fathers to take leave and for organizations to plan for it. Dahl et al. (2014), who studied the peer effect of father quota usage, found that fathers are even more

likely to take the quota if their colleagues did. The effect was greatest if a manager at a higher level in the organization had taken the fathers' leave.

Many of the fathers confidently portrayed the quota as *their* leave. In so doing, they conveyed a sense of entitlement and beliefs about what is right and fair. Hobson and Morgan (2002:14) hold that family friendly policies provide men with discursive resources with which they can make claims upon their employers. Ivar communicated that it was he who was in control, and he was not afraid to insist on his priorities.

Entitled as caregivers

Fathers' role as caregivers is important for their sense of entitlement. They communicated an identity as competent caregivers and attributed this to their time on leave when they had gotten to know the child well. They thought that children benefit from close contact with fathers, and that fathers are significant caregivers for children. Erlend said:

It is quite unfair that only mothers are regarded as important for the children. Speaking as a man I think this is a new situation for gender equality.... I have been able to prove that I can be just as good a carer as the mother. I think it is super important! It increases men's self-confidence and society's confidence in men as caregivers.

Regarding it as unfair that only mothers are given support as caregivers, these men see the fathers' quota as remedying this injustice. They justify their entitlement to leave as based on their ability to care for their small children and think the fathers' quota contributes to their being seen as important parents. They feel entitled to both the joys and burdens of childcare and stress that the fathers' quota represents an opportunity to develop an autonomous relationship with their children. "Being home on leave has in a way laid the foundation for the contact we [father and child] have today. A lot will happen later in life, but this is the basis," Didrik said.

The quota as a father-specific right simplifies negotiations with the mother. Sivert realized that this was the point of earmarking it: "This is why they designed it like that. If not, nothing would have come of it. Then the mother would have taken the whole leave". He thought that to many people it is still not obvious that the father will choose to stay home with the child. To avoid making parental leave only mothers' leave, he said, it was important that things were not "made completely free".

Employed fathers view the fathers' quota as an entitlement, a support from the state for them to be active caregivers. There are strong moral obligations for fathers to take the father's quota and for employers to accept it. This finding seems important in understanding the high use of the quota among fathers in Norway.

FATHERS' SENSE OF ENTITLEMENT TO SHARED PARENTAL LEAVE

Do fathers feel equally entitled to the leave that is given to mothers and fathers to share however they wish? As entitlement is embedded in cultural and moral understandings of appropriate fatherhood and motherhood, we first explore how fathers compare their sense of entitlement with mothers' and then turn to feedback they receive from colleagues and employers, which shape their understandings of shared leave.

Fathers' rights and mothers' entitlement

The fathers are fully aware that fathers have the right to more leave than the fathers' quota, but their sense of entitlement to shared parental leave is much weaker and quite ambivalent. David expressed it this way: "In my view the father has ten weeks and mother has the rest. But this is *not* how it is. Only, in my head it is". This statement juxtaposes legal rights and policy provisions with his subjective sense of what is fair and just. Several other fathers expressed similar ambivalence. "We are equally valuable for the child," David said, "but the mother has better rights than the father in this whole process. Fathers are in a way only supporting players in the pregnancy- and birth- and confinement period. To share the leave equally would be unnatural".

These fathers know they can take more leave time than the quota provides, but they view the shared leave as the mother's entitlement. Many fathers said it was unlikely that they would take any leave if it was not father-specific. When asked how he regarded the shared leave, Lars stated: "I think about it as a ... really as mothers' leave, actually". This attitude was also apparent in the plans this couple had for their next child, who was due quite soon: "For us it was never a question that I would have more than what I had to have. Now, the fathers' quota is quite long, really, in my opinion.... So for us it's quite natural.... Both of us, she and I, want her to have the largest portion of it". Max shared this way of thinking: "I view it as mother's leave, and I would never have been able to fight for more leave for myself. She insisted: 'I want the leave!' There was no opening for me to have more, and I didn't push for

it, either". These stories reveal that even when parental leave is gender neutral in character, it is often perceived as the mother's entitlement.

The main reasons why these fathers understand shared leave as mothers' entitlement more than their own concern mothers' need for rest after childbirth. Erlend explained that in their case, "Both mother and child were affected by a hard birth. So, it would be hopeless for me to take five months leave. Mother was not physically or mentally fit to start work. She needed nine months". A second reason they mentioned was breastfeeding. Christian elaborated: "Equal rights to parental leave is one thing, but I think there are some biological facts here that are difficult to neglect. All that has to do with giving birth and breastfeeding—I think it is a difficult matter". Steffen, a police officer, was eager to take part in providing childcare, but he felt that the mother was the most suitable person when the children were small. He explained: "She enjoys it, in a way. And then I don't see anything wrong with that... I think that ... there is something special between mother and child when kids are so young".

About one third of the men we interviewed, however, had used some shared parental leave. Didrik and Emil took all the shared leave because the mothers were students and not eligible. The fact that mothers' ineligibility influences fathers' parental leave use has been pointed out in other countries as well (McKay and Doucet, 2010). Hans took most of the shared leave because the mother of his child wanted to return to work as soon as possible. These three men felt entitled by virtue of their competence as caregivers. Moreover, the child's entitlement to home-based care during its first year of life, which is a social norm in Norway, contributed to their sense of entitlement to a long leave.

The other five fathers who had taken some of the shared parental leave had negotiated with the mother. Sivert said that "actually, she gave some of it to me. She wanted me to have it." Here he confirms that he understands shared leave as mothers' leave because she is in the position to give it to him. Others are more aware of their own entitlement to the shared leave and engaged in strong discussions with the mother about sharing. Steinar said:

Really, I want as much leave time as possible with the kids, but we have to weigh that against how dependent the child is on being breastfed and how attached to the child the mother is. We have had intense discussions about how much time I am allowed to have in addition to the fathers' quota. Many speak about mummy's leave and daddy's

leave, meaning daddy's leave is the quota and mummy's leave is everything else. I am allergic to that because it is a *parental* leave.... It's fairer to share fifty-fifty.

Steinar referred to the general understanding that shared parental leave is a mothers' right, and he wanted to educate people because many did not know that fathers were entitled to more. His feeling of entitlement is based on society's gender equality norms.

Fred and his wife are the only couple in the sample who shared the leave equally. He explained that, having had a feminist mother, he never regarded the shared parental leave as only a women's entitlement, although he recognized that view was common. He had a strong motivation to stay home with his child as long as possible and opted for equal sharing. They agreed on fifty-fifty sharing long before the baby was born. Fred said: "I took the initiative to share equally, and she supported it from a theoretical perspective. She hesitated a bit when we did the paper work, but we felt we would both gain from it. Later, it was emotionally harder for her, but she saw the importance of my involvement". For this couple there was a correspondence between legal and subjective rights. Like Steinar's, Fred's sense of entitlement to an equal share in parenting was rooted in social norms of gender equality. In his case, his wife agreed, rather than appealing to traditional gender norms and the biological strains of giving birth and breastfeeding.

These examples underline the different views and ambivalences concerning fathers' entitlement to shared parental leave. Some comply with the norms of gendered parenting, while a few others actively oppose them. The men's legal rights and their subjective sense or moral understandings of motherhood and fatherhood are sometimes, but not always, in line with each other.

Sense of entitlement and workplace norms

Fathers' sense of entitlement is heavily influenced by workplace cultures and norms of the ideal worker. Workplaces support men's entitlement to the fathers' quota. But to what extent does shared parental leave comply with the norms at the fathers' workplaces?

An ambivalence is noticeable when it comes to workplaces' attitudes towards shared parental leave. Geir, who worked in a very demanding organization, said that his workplace encourages use of the fathers' quota, "but not more than that! None of my bosses said 'you just have to take more if you feel like it'. So, ten weeks were taken for granted, but no one suggested more, and I felt it was not natural at that workplace". He adjusted his sense of

entitlement to the cultural values of his workplace. He continued: "I don't think they would have refused me if I asked for more than the ten weeks, but it wouldn't be very popular". He feared he might lose his bonuses and be assigned to customers that were not considered attractive. As other fathers also pointed out, it is a different matter to tell the employer that they will take the quota from asking for more time under the optional shared leave.

Although Sivert personally had taken a larger portion of the parental leave, he observed that taking more than the quota is frowned upon, particularly among his colleagues. His workmates took precisely what they felt entitled to, which is to say the father's quota: "The people I know, they only take just what they have to. Not an hour more!" Sivert's story is an example of a father who challenged the expectations for how parental leave should be shared between the mother and the father. His choice provides insight into his workmates' attitudes on this issue. Sivert worked as an electrician in the male-dominated construction industry. With his second child he stretched his leave over a long period of time, by using both the father's quota and shared parental leave on a part-time basis, alternating with the mother. His wife preferred this arrangement, as she wanted to go back to work on a part-time basis a bit earlier than if she had taken all the sharable leave. For the two of them, this was an "easy choice". But his colleagues found his use of shared parental leave strange, confronting him with the dominant ideals of masculinity at work. "So they said to me many times: 'Quite the little woman, aren't you?'" They mocked Sivert for his caregiving. At this workplace, fathers were not regarded as entitled to the shared leave.

Workmates in many places regarded the longer, shared leave as gendered feminine. Comparing fathers to employed mothers, Geir felt: "When women say they are going on leave, employers think that she bore the child, so it's not mandatory for her to go to work, but if a man says that he will have half a year's leave, they would probably say: 'can't your wife take it?' Something like that". Sivert countered his colleagues' comments that he was doing "women's work": "Nah, I told them: Why shouldn't I be doing that? At least I know my kids. I really get to know them well!" His co-workers' reactions reveal that in some sectors fathers are not expected to use the parental leave that can be shared with their spouse.

Two of the fathers we interviewed who used considerable amounts of shared leave, Emil and Fred, had very tolerant employers. Emil's vocational training was in the construction trades and he worked as a house painter. He was home on leave with the youngest for 12 full months because the mother was a student. When asked whether he had

problems at work when he decided to take such a long leave, he said: "No, I ... It was easy, because the boss simply had to accept it. That's the way it is, really. He would just have to accept fewer work contracts then. He had to!" Emil stated that he did not have a bad conscience in relation to his workplace, although no one was hired to replace him: "It's not so simple in the house painting trade, you know, because you don't know what you get. You can't just hire somebody, really. It's hard to find good people, because they are probably doing well where they're working already. That's the way it is..." In this field, the employer had to accept and adapt to the fact that men have caregiving obligations and are entitled to long leaves.

Fred, an architect with one daughter, worked in a very small firm with three middle-aged women as colleagues. "They are very understanding, and they are well-educated women who have had their challenges with gender equality. Career-wise, leave is not negative for me." Fred was the partner with technological competence, which could have been a problem during his leave. But he thought it went well, partly thanks to his flexibility:

They called and asked for assistance sometimes. We agreed on that. It is ok, but I told them to limit it as much as possible, and they are very good at it, I think. They called mostly in the beginning of my leave as there were matters they had forgotten to ask me about, but lately they have been good at refraining from calling. It's important to me, because I don't want to think too much about my job when I'm home on leave.

Emil and Fred both worked in small businesses, which are considered particularly vulnerable when fathers take leave from work (Bygren and Duvander, 2006). Both were irreplaceable. Yet, even though we might expect very different ideals of masculinity in these two industries, both their employers supported their long leaves and found solutions to their absences. This accommodation may be a sign of a new social contract that considers male employees as caregivers at home as well as contributors at work.

CONCLUSIONS

This study examined the sense of entitlement to parental leave from the state among fathers who have taken parental leave in Norway, which has generous parental leave rights based on a goal of gender equality with mothers and fathers sharing childcare and employment.

The sense of entitlement as a concept denotes beliefs and feelings about rights based on the broader social ideology of gender equality and parenting norms as well as the more local cultures and norms in workplaces (Lewis and Smithson, 2001). The fathers' quota seems to be firmly embedded in workplace practices and cultures in a way that sustains active fatherhood and contributes to increased gender equality in childcare. That the fathers' quota has become internalized as an entitlement indicates a certain shift in masculinity (Brandth and Kvande, 2018). Brighthouse and Wright (2008) seem correct in saying that individual parental leave rights tend to promote gender equality. The fathers' quota, which is earmarked and non-transferable, is understood as 'owned' by fathers, which renders negotiations with employers as well as mothers unnecessary. Their sense of entitlement to this leave influenced social comparisons and perceptions of the feasibility of letting men work in ways that are compatible with family life. It is interesting that fathers also see themselves as entitled on the basis of their own competence as caregivers. The more they are involved in the nurture and care of their own children, the more self-confidence they seem to gain.

Fathers have, at most, a tentative and ambivalent sense of entitlement regarding shared parental leave. The general societal norms constitute shared leave as primarily mothers' entitlement. These norms, which are also dominant among managers and workmates, affect fathers' own understandings and actions. The strain on women's bodies caused by pregnancy, birth and breastfeeding strongly influence men's feelings about what is just and fair. Yet these results are ambiguous rather than unqualified. Some fathers stress that this leave is parental, and not maternal, and insist on their own entitlement. Gender equality norms and comparisons both with the mother and workmates suggest ongoing processes of change. Despite the negative attitudes that prevail in many workplaces, some fathers use their individual sense of entitlement to take advantage of this policy, and their decisions are supported by employers who find ways to handle their long absences without the fathers losing their status as essential employees. Our findings support Brighthouse and Whyte's (2001) claim that such policies enable equality, rather than reproducing and reinforcing gendered prescriptions.

By comparing fathers' sense of entitlement to these two types of leave, the analysis adds to previous research that has explained why statutory, ear-marked and non-transferable leave works better than shared rights when it comes to fathers taking parental leave. Fathers' uptake of leave is one manifestation of the norm of equal parenting, and the leave has given fathers valuable caring experiences and competences that they otherwise would not have

gotten (Kvande and Brandth, 2017b). To more fully understand how the norm of gender equal parenting works would require further examination of the content of fathers' leave practices. This question is, however, beyond the analysis in this paper.

The current liberal/conservative Norwegian government seems to believe in the qualities of the fathers' quota as it has recently expanded it at the expense of shared leave. Notwithstanding, our analysis has shown that legal rights alone are insufficient to create a sense of entitlement. Rights do not exist in a contextual vacuum, and entitlements are constructed on the basis of social and normative comparisons on the local as well as the national level (Lewis and Smithson, 2001). Norms and rationalities that underlie how families work are important parts of the context. If welfare states seek to promote fathers' involvement in caring for young children, they must recognize that parents' reactions to policies are mediated by normative conceptions, including what is considered good mothering and fathering. There are no universal norms that mandate the same response to similar policies in all social groups and in all countries. We have studied white, heterosexual fathers in a Norwegian context. Comparative research to inform policymaking and employers would be welcome.

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