

ECONOMIC AND SOCIAL BENEFITS OF ENHANCED PATERNITY LEAVE

Scoping Review

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PATERNITY LEAVE PAYS FOR ITSELF

By Gary Barker, CEO & Founder Equipundo: Center for Masculinities & Social Justice and Julia Gillard, Chair, King's Global Institute for Women's Leadership

The progress toward full equality in pay and workforce participation for women has been slow and unsteady, including in the UK. The world is still 123 years away from workforce and gender income equality according to the latest Global Gender Gap report. Despite the growing evidence and academic consensus around what should be done to reduce the gender wage gap, political and corporate leaders have been too slow and too reticent to act to reduce it.

Furthermore, as the GIWL International Women's Day reports (2025, 2026) show, the past decade has seen a global pushback against the full and necessary progress towards gender equality.

Yet the evidence is clear. Paid leave for fathers and other male caregivers - alongside paid leave for mothers and female caregivers - is one of the easiest solutions to enact by policymakers. And, as our analysis here shows, it pays for itself. By supporting mother's return to work, we support household income, tax revenues, as well as improving family well-being and preventing family breakdown.

The most recent research from Equipundo's State of the World's Fathers report (2026) finds that women and men affirm that men are doing a greater share of hands-on care work than in the past. In the UK, Equipundo's and Beyond Equality's recent State of UK Men report (2025) also finds that fathers want to do more: 80% of fathers we surveyed agreed that "being a dad is the most enjoyable job in the world" and the same proportion called for more support to juggle work and family life. As GIWL's 2026 report has shown, recent policies, such as remote working, help fathers to be more involved. However, the care gap is still there – and it is one of the key factors driving the gender workplace and pay gap. But rather than men just not wanting to do more, social structures fail to support them.

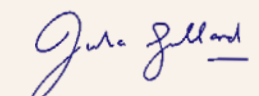
Consistently, men and women across the world tell us that care policies rank among their top priorities. Men and women tell us they will vote for politicians who make non-transferable paid leave available for mothers, fathers and all caregivers. This is why we have seen in the past decade many countries, including the European Union, move towards providing fathers and second parents with more ear-marked well-paid leave.

The current scheme of transferable leave for the couple, and limited designated leave for fathers, forces families to make difficult choices that perpetuate gender inequality, both at home and in the labour market. As seen in the recent national parents' strike, voters are aware of these choices and tell us clearly that they want non-transferable, well-paid, and earmarked leave for fathers. Families need it. And they will thrive when we offer it.

The additional push we offer here is an economic analysis showing that it pays for itself. As the multiple causal evidence presented in this report makes clear, countries that provide solid paternity leave see strong return on their investment across domains. Encouraging men to be equal parents not only helps parents, but also generates effects that reach children, in the longer run, well beyond the length of the leave, and on society at large.

We are at a strategic moment to encourage and support men to do their fair share. Equipundo's research finds that men find more meaning and happiness in being involved caregivers. There are no more excuses for delaying on paid leave in the UK. Only time for action. Other countries have already taken their step towards providing a more equal share of leave for both parents. This country's families and caregivers also expect nothing less. They will mobilise for it, and they will vote for it.


Gary Barker


Julia Gillard

What are the economic benefits of a paternity leave reform that provides fathers with longer and more generous, earmarked leave?

We conducted a scoping review of the causal evidence on paternity leave and parental leave earmarked for fathers, drawing on 33 key studies of policy reforms across Europe, Canada and the US, the majority of which use quasi-experimental designs (including difference-in-differences and regression discontinuity) on large-scale administrative data.

WHAT WE CAN BE CONFIDENT ABOUT:

- **Fathers take reserved leave, especially when it is well paid and earmarked, and it changes what they do at home.** The majority of studies evidence that paternity leave leads to more fathers' involvement and a more equal division of labour at home.
- **This supports mothers' employment.** Reforms in Canada, Spain and Germany raised mothers' employment and **full-time work by around 3-5 percentage points.**
- **It narrows the gender pay gap and keeps narrowing it after the leave ends.** Denmark's reform cut the earnings gap by a further 2.8pp in the year *after* leave had finished.

EVIDENCE ALSO SUPPORTS WIDER SOCIAL BENEFITS, ALBEIT NOT AS STRONG:

- There is some evidence to show that **enhanced paternity leave can enhance wellbeing and life satisfaction of parents, and reduce mental and physical health problems of mothers and fathers**, although this evidence base is not as established, with mixed results.
- There is stronger evidence around paternity leave resulting in **reduction in separation and divorce in couples**, although the impact varies across different couples' characteristics.
- Similarly, there is some evidence around enhanced leave for fathers **increasing fertility rates**, although benefits depend substantially on women's employment and earnings, birth order, and the design of the leave policy.
- Some preliminary evidence also indicates parental leave leads to better **child wellbeing and cognitive outcomes** largely via the impact of leave on increased father's involvement in childcare. These social benefits can also be **translated into economic benefits for the government and families.**
- Beyond this, we also found some evidence for larger **gender role attitudinal changes** not only of parents but also of children, which can have long-lasting impact on society.

Paternity leave leading to wider social benefits, can indirectly result in economic gains via enhancing wellbeing and reducing social costs. Paternity leave can result in happier, healthier families, enhancing not only parental but also child wellbeing and cognitive outcomes.

WHAT THIS COULD BE WORTH IN THE UK

Modelling for the UK, based on extending paternity leave to six weeks at 90% of earnings, has shown a potential economic impact of:

- **Economic growth: £2.68 billion a year**, at a net cost to the Treasury of around £220 million (JRF/CPP modelling). This net figure reflects a £5.5 billion increase in economic output from higher female employment and hours, partially offset by a £2.8 billion reduction in output as fathers take time away from work. Wider social benefits including wellbeing and reduced family separation have been modelled at up to £12.8 billion (Clifton-Sprigg et al modelling).

Reduced family breakdown: £599 million (Clifton-Sprigg et al. modelling). Family breakdown cost the Exchequer over £50 billion in 2018. Iceland's one-month quota cut parental separation by 11.6 percentage points at five years and 8.9 percentage points at fifteen years; across 27 European countries, at least two weeks of paid leave reduced divorce rates by 0.36 percentage points per 1,000 people over fifteen years.



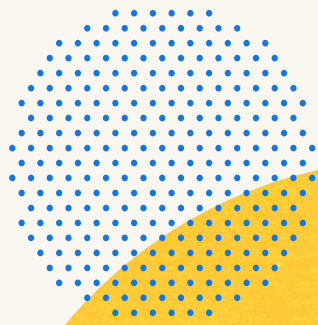
WHAT REFORM MUST LOOK LIKE

The evidence does not support paternity leave reform in the abstract. It supports a specific configuration – and partial reform will not deliver.

1. **Well paid** – pay, not duration, is the binding constraint on take-up
2. **Non-transferable** – Shared Parental Leave has 4% take-up precisely because it is shareable
3. **Longer, and taken solo** – for example, six weeks at 90% of average weekly earnings, taken independently of the mother
4. **Accessible** – extended to the self-employed and those on insecure contracts
5. **Culturally supported** – with employer guidance and attention to small firms
6. **Supported alongside other policies** – such as accessible, good-quality childcare provision and flexible working right

THE BOTTOM LINE

Extended, fully funded, shared paternity leave is not a welfare issue, or a gender equality issue alone. It is an economic imperative and a strategic investment, with the potential to recatalyse productivity.



PARENTAL LEAVE AS AN ANSWER TO THE UK’S PRODUCTIVITY PROBLEM?

The UK has faced long-standing concerns about productivity, which has stagnated since the financial crisis and has declined relative to comparator economies. Labour and skills shortages are currently being experienced by companies across the UK, with economic inactivity one of the biggest contributors to this problem.¹ Yet there is a substantial untapped workforce: an estimated 1.2 million potential returners to the UK labour market, 91% of whom are women.² Analysis by PwC indicates that a 5% increase in women’s labour market participation rate could add £125 billion per annum to the UK economy.³ Given that approximately 37% of GDP is collected in taxes, narrowing the gender gap in employment could translate into potential government revenue growth of approximately £34 billion.

We know that well-designed parental leave, and well-paid leave earmarked for fathers in particular,⁴ can help unlock these gains. By enabling a more equal division of care from the start of a child’s life, it can enhance mothers’ labour market participation, earnings and career progression. It can also help reduce the “motherhood penalty”, a loss of earnings averaging £65,618 in the five years after a first birth,⁵ supporting the financial stability of households across the UK. It is important to note that improving paternity leave should complement, not be a substitute for, stronger maternity leave and pay, as mothers need adequate protection, recovery time and income security, while fathers need additional, non-transferable leave that enables them to share care from the outset. The current system, which combines substantial maternity entitlement with minimal, poorly paid father-specific leave, reinforces the expectation that mothers are and will remain the primary carers.⁶ Shifting that balance from the start can support both gender equality and economic growth for the country.⁷ Beyond the labour market, paternity leave shapes maternal and paternal mental health, couples’ satisfaction and wellbeing, and children’s emotional and cognitive development – with the potential to reduce wider social costs to the state. Indeed, studies estimate that extending and better funding paternity leave would not represent a net cost to government, but would, instead, represent a clear investment that would contribute £2.68 billion in additional economic growth.⁸

The question this report addresses is whether these claims stand up to scrutiny: can parental leave truly deliver economic benefits and productivity gains for the country?

1 B. Francis-Devine and I. Buchanan, *Skills and labour shortages* (House of Commons Library, 2023) p.8. A. Powell, and B. Francis-Devine, *UK labour market statistics* (House of Commons Library, 2026) p.5.

2 Government Equalities Office, *Gender equality at every stage: A roadmap for change* (HM Government, 2019) p.8.

3 PwC, *PwC Women in Work 2024*, (2024) p.3.

4 In this report, we use the term fathers for fathers and all non-birthing or “second” parents, which can include non-birthing mothers and all non-binary parents, and “mothers” as the birthing parent. We understand that this terminology may feel exclusionary to diverse types of family that exist outside the heteronormative coupled relationship; for the simplicity of the report we use the terms “fathers” and “mothers”. In many country cases – like majority of EU countries and OECD countries – the legal regulations around parental leave note father or equivalent second parent or partner.

5 ONS, *The impact of motherhood on monthly employee earnings and employment status, England: April 2014 to December 2022* (ONS, 2025).

6 H. Mandel and M. Semyonov, A Welfare State Paradox: State Interventions and Women’s Employment Opportunities in 22 Countries, *American Journal of Sociology*, 111, 6, (2006) pp.1910-1949.

7 IMF (2023) Countries That Close Gender Gaps See Substantial Growth Returns <https://www.imf.org/en/blogs/articles/2023/09/27/countries-that-close-gender-gaps-see-substantial-growth-returns>

8 L. Woodruff (2025). Improving statutory paternity leave would benefit families and the economy (report). Joseph Rowntree Foundation. <https://www.jrf.org.uk/sites/default/files/pdfs/improving-statutory-paternity-leave-would-benefit-families-and-the-economy-aed0aa515a2b39b76032a6b373449e11.pdf>



WHY NOW: THE UK IS FALLING BEHIND

We argue that now is the right time for a review of the UK's parental leave system, and in this report we focus specifically on what fathers are offered. The UK gives fathers almost no dedicated and adequately paid time to care, while financial support for mothers is also insufficient. Together, these arrangements default early care to mothers. Fathers are entitled to only two weeks of statutory paternity leave, paid at £194.32 per week or less,⁹ a fraction of both the minimum wage (£508 for a 40-hour week at £12.71/h) and the Real Living Wage. As a result, over half of families report financial difficulty when fathers take paternity leave.¹⁰ While shared parental leave exists, very few fathers (~4%) use it, because it pays too little and fathers are – or often feel they are – penalised for taking it.¹¹ The UK experience demonstrates that shareability alone is insufficient to generate substantial paternal uptake.¹² Evidence from Germany and Sweden instead points to earmarking – reserving a portion of leave for fathers on a use-it-or-lose-it basis – and adequate replacement pay as a more effective mechanism, one which also increases uptake of shared leave more broadly.¹³

The UK is well behind other countries that have understood the importance of investing in parental leave for fathers not only for social justice, but to ensure a productive labour market future (see Figure 1). Following the transposition of the EU Work-Life Balance Directive, EU member states now grant fathers two months of earmarked leave at (at least) 60% pay. Many OECD countries have gone further still, rapidly expanding their leave systems in recent years. Korea, for example, now offers fathers among the longest and best-paid earmarked leave in the OECD, with 20 days of fully paid paternity leave followed by another 18 earmarked months of paid parental leave, which is 100% income replacement for the first six months and 80% for the rest, capped at ₩4.5 million per month (equivalent to approximately £2,250).¹⁴

Current UK statutory rates of maternity, paternity and parental pay are among the lowest in the OECD.¹⁵ Among the 52 countries covered by the International Network on Leave Policies and Research's 2025 review, the UK is an outlier among high-income countries in providing fathers with very little well-paid, individual leave. In contrast, countries such as Spain, Sweden and Germany provide fathers with substantial paid individual entitlements.¹⁶

9. Mothers in the UK are entitled to 52 weeks of maternity leave (39 weeks paid, 13 unpaid). Since April 2026, the right to maternity leave has been a day-one entitlement for all employees. However, statutory pay, including maternity pay, remains restricted to employees who have worked for their employer for at least 26 weeks. Pay levels are also low: the first six weeks are paid at 90% of average gross weekly earnings, while the remaining weeks are paid at either the flat rate (£194.32 per week) or 90% of average earnings, whichever is lower. In short, while paternity leave entitlements in the UK are notably weak, mothers' financial support during leave is also far from generous.

10. Trades Union Congress (2023). One in two families struggles financially when dads take paternity leave: TUC poll. Available at: <https://www.tuc.org.uk/news/1-2-families-struggle-financially-when-dads-take-paternity-leave-tuc-poll>.

11. G. Kaufman (2018). Barriers to equality: why British fathers do not use parental leave. *Community, Work & Family*, 21(3), 310–325.

12. J. Clifton-Sprigg, E. Fichera, E. Kaya and M.K. Jones (2025). Fathers taking leave: evaluating the impact of shared parental leave in the United Kingdom, *Fiscal Studies*, 46(3), pp.399–410. doi:10.1111/1475-5890.70000.

13. M. Bünning (2015). What happens after the "daddy months"? Fathers' involvement in paid work, childcare and housework after taking parental leave in Germany, *European Sociological Review*, 31(6), pp.738–748. doi:10.1093/esr/jcv072. A.-Z. Duvander and M. Johansson (2012) What are the effects of reforms promoting fathers' parental leave use? *Journal of European Social Policy*, 22(3), pp.319–330.

14. Korean Government Ministry of Labor Website: https://www.vorlife.kr/website_renew/index/workerSupport/parental_leave_benefit.asp

15. Y. Chzhen, A. Gromada and G. Rees, *Are the world's richest countries family friendly? Policy in the OECD and EU* (UNICEF, 2019) p.6. Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development, PF2.4: Parental leave replacement rates (OECD, 2017) p.2. House of Commons – Women and Equalities Committee, Equality at work: Paternity and shared parental leave: Sixth Report of Session 2024–25, HC 502, (House of Commons, 2025) p.1.

16. I. Dobrotić, S. Blum, G. Kaufmann, A. Koslowski, P. Moss and M. Valentova, (eds.) *International Review of Leave Policies and Research 2025*, (International Network on Leave Policies and Research, 2025), p.14 and p.22.

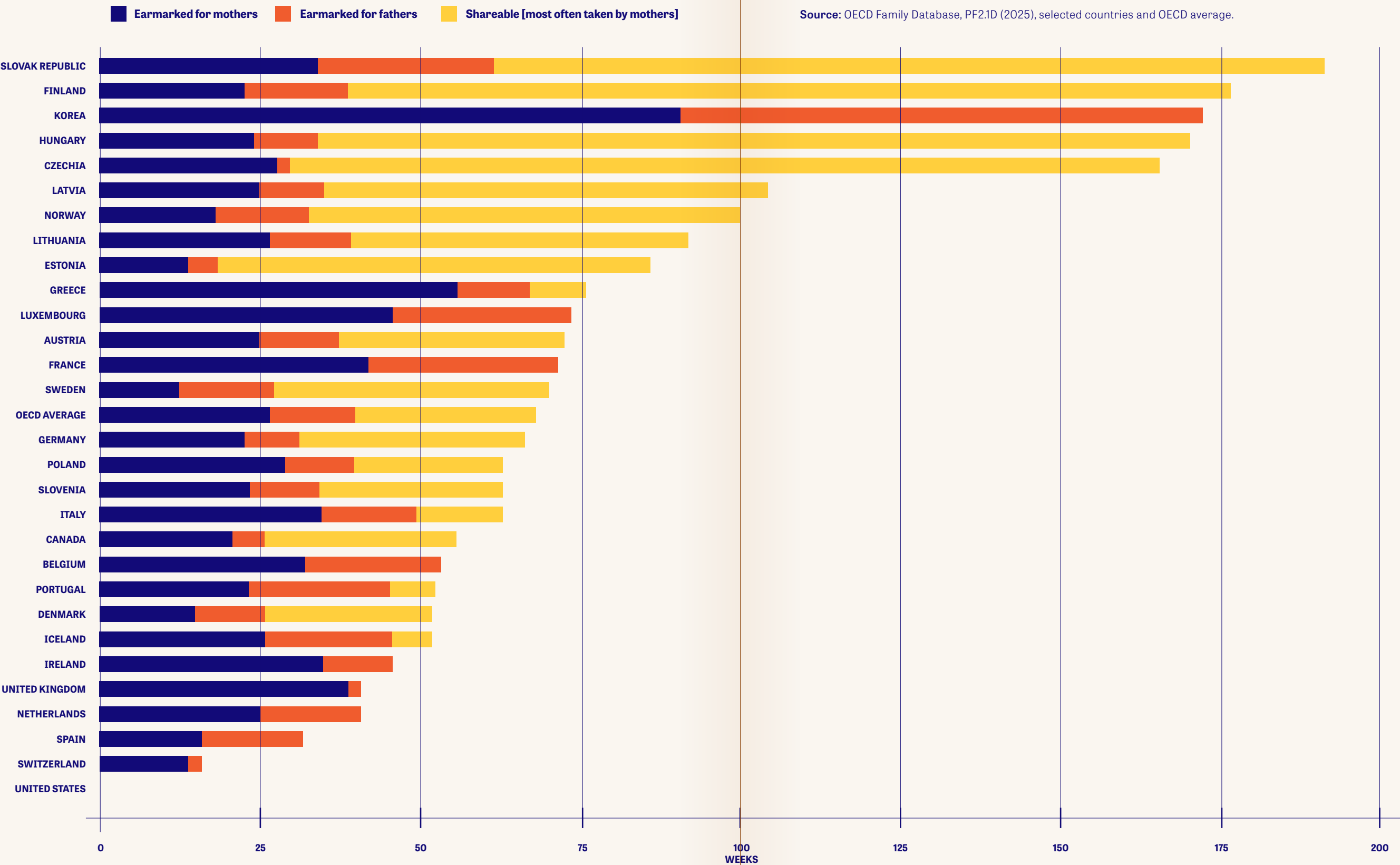
Maternity leave in the UK fares only slightly better, with just 1.4 of its 9.1 paid months meeting the well-paid threshold. By comparison, Germany, a broadly comparable economy, pays parental leave at 65–67% of earnings, capped at €1,800/month, while France offers 60–100% depending on leave type (typically capped at €4,005/month). Importantly, as other countries modernise their leave systems,¹⁷ the UK risks being left with a model that increasingly appears outdated, inadequate and not fit for purpose.

Crucially, this recent wave of international reform also provides us with an opportunity. The introduction of earmarked, well-paid paternity leave across Europe and the OECD countries has generated a rich body of evidence, including natural experiments and quasi-experimental studies, on what these policies deliver in practice. This evidence provides the UK with more concrete evidence base of what we can anticipate when well-paid earmarked paternity leave for fathers is introduced in the country. This is what this report will be providing.

17. A. Kasperska, H. Chung and S. Jung, *Parental Leave Systems in the United Kingdom, Australia and Poland: A Comparative Review* (King's Global Institute for Women's Leadership, 2026).



Figure 1. Earmarked and shareable child-related leave entitlements across selected OECD countries



Note: Figure shows paid, employment-protected, child-related, leave entitlements as of April 2025. “Earmarked” leave is individual and non-transferable between parents (eg “daddy quotas”), while “shareable” leave is jointly owned and can be freely split between parents. Leave that originates as the mother’s entitlement but can be transferred to the father, such as the UK’s Shared Parental Leave, is counted under “earmarked for mothers”, not “shareable”, since it derives from her allocation rather than being jointly owned from the outset. Unpaid leave entitlements (eg the UK’s separate 18-week unpaid Parental Leave) are not included.

Source: OECD Family Database, PF2.1D (2025), selected countries and OECD average.

THIS REPORT: SCOPING THE EVIDENCE

This report provides evidence for the UK government currently undertaking a review of parental leave and pay, and for any other governments or policy stakeholders with an interest in parental leave reforms. The central question is, what is the evidence on the economic and employment benefits of supporting fathers' earmarked leave? Although the benefits of parental leave reform are multi-dimensional, including for family wellbeing and gender equality – which in their own right provide economic benefits for the country – the main barrier to parental leave reform has been the uncertainty around the economic costs and benefits of the systems change. Although there have been some studies around the topic, there has been some hesitation around accepting the evidence, in part because of suspicion around the data and the strength of the claims made. This report therefore distils the key recent literature on parental leave reforms in other countries that provide fathers with earmarked, well-paid leave, setting out the economic and social benefits of fair paternity leave based on the evidence, while also highlighting the strengths and weaknesses of different studies. Moreover, wherever possible, it applies that learning to the UK context, giving a robust, evidence-based indication of the likely economic and social gains from investing in six weeks' well-paid paternity leave, while acknowledging that these are only indicative rather than precise predictions for the UK context.

STRENGTH OF THE EVIDENCE

Evidence from the following sections primarily draws on quasi-experimental studies exploiting policy reforms across Europe and Canada, with additional evidence from high-quality observational and experimental studies where relevant. The full search strategy is set out in Appendix 1, and a complete summary of the studies underpinning this evidence base is provided in Appendix 2.

The strongest studies on the effects of leave reforms use quasi-experimental designs – the gold standard being randomised controlled trials.

The evidence base for this brief usually combines three overlapping features:

- Policy reform evidence: Most studies examine real-world parental leave reforms by comparing people who were affected by a reform with similar people who were not, for example, because of differences in eligibility, timing or location. These reforms therefore provide the real-world variation that researchers can use to estimate policy effects.
- Experimental methods: Most studies use quasi-experimental designs such as difference-in-differences, and regression discontinuity, to make use of that policy variation and separate the effect of the reform from wider changes happening at the same time. Other studies use survey experiments and vignette studies, which randomly vary features of the leave design to identify their causal effects.

- Rich longitudinal data: Many studies use administrative register data, which provide whole-population records tracking families over several years. Others use high-quality representative longitudinal surveys, which repeatedly follow large samples of families over time. This not only strengthens causal analysis, but also allows us to assess whether the effect persists after the leave has ended.

Notably, while these designs provide strong causal evidence, some studies presented in the report evaluate broader parental leave reforms that simultaneously changed several policy features (e.g. leave duration, payment generosity and reserved leave for fathers). While these studies cannot always isolate the effect of the leave alone, they still show the overall effects of the reform on families in real-world settings. Some more recent evidence also comes from working papers or reports, which have not yet undergone peer review, but this is explicitly marked in the text (and flagged in the Publication Status column of Appendix 2).

DEFINITION OF PARENTAL LEAVE

In this report, “paternity leave” refers specifically to leave reserved for fathers or second parents, usually around the time of a child’s birth.¹⁸ However, some of the evidence presented in this report relates to the “daddy quota” - the portion of parental leave that can be used only by the father or second parent and cannot be transferred to the mother or main leave-taker - within parental leave systems, or fathers’ use of transferable parental leave rather than just paternity leave in the strict sense.¹⁹

This distinction matters because some countries, for instance Germany, do not have separate maternity and paternity leave schemes at all, but instead operate a single, shareable parental leave system, while having earmarked proportions for each parent. These studies are included when they provide relevant evidence on the consequences of fathers taking leave, given cross-national differences in policy terminology and design.

18 OECD, PF21. Parental leave systems (OECD Family Database, 2026), p.1

19 Ibid, p.1

Table 1. Illustrative example of how leave is structured in three OECD countries: the UK, Australia and Poland

COUNTRY	MATERNITY LEAVE (MOTHER-ONLY)	PATERNITY LEAVE (RESERVED FOR FATHER)	PARENTAL LEAVE RESERVED/NON- TRANSFERABLE PORTION	PARENTAL LEAVE SHARED/ TRANSFERABLE POOL	TOTAL FATHER - SPECIFIC (RESERVED) WEEKS
UK	52 weeks (39 paid, 13 unpaid)	1-2 weeks, poorly paid (25% of the median full-time wage)	No non-transferable father quota	Shared Parental Leave (SPL): up to 50 weeks transferable from mother to partner (37 paid max), poorly paid (25% of the median full-time wage)	1-2 weeks
Australia	No separate statutory maternity leave	No separate statutory paternity leave	Non-transferable portion within Parental Leave Pay: 20 days per parent , moderately paid (65% of the median full-time wage)	Parental Leave Pay (PLP): 26 weeks, shared flexibly between parents , moderately paid (65% of the median full-time wage)	~4 weeks
Poland	20 weeks, paid at 100% of previous wages	2 weeks, paid at 100% of previous wages	9 weeks per parent, non-transferable, paid at 70% of previous wages	41 weeks total, of which 23 weeks can be shared between parents, paid at 70% of previous wages	11 weeks (2 + 9)

Note: “Reserved”/“non-transferable” leave belongs specifically to the father and is lost if unused (a “daddy quota”).

Source: A. Kasperska, H. Chung and S. Jung (2026). *Parental Leave Systems in the United Kingdom, Australia and Poland: A Comparative Review*.

WHY SIX WEEKS AND 90%

The recommendation for at least six weeks, paid at 90%, rather than a shorter extension or simply better-paid two-week entitlement, draws on evidence that both the level of pay and the duration of leave matter.

International evidence suggests that adequate pay is important for encouraging fathers to take leave, while paternity leave taking also tends to closely follow the amount of leave specifically reserved for them.²⁰ Longer periods of leave, particularly when reserved for fathers and involving periods of solo care, are more consistently associated with sustained changes in fathers’ involvement in childcare even after leave has ended, as well as wider economic and social benefits, as we present in the following sections.²¹ This is also consistent with the Centre for Progressive Policy (CPP)’s cross-country analysis of 38 OECD countries, which found that countries offering more than six weeks of paid paternity leave had, on average, a 4 percentage points smaller gender pay gap and a 3.7 percentage points smaller labour force participation gap than countries offering less than six weeks.²² While better pay for the existing two weeks would likely increase fathers’ take-up, it would still leave fathers with only a short period of protected time to establish a substantial caregiving role. By contrast, a UK-calibrated modelling²³ shows that an expansion to six weeks at 90% pay could lead to about 74% of eligible fathers taking the leave and generating substantial net social benefits. This precise six-week threshold should not, however, be understood as a firmly established tipping point. Instead, it is more of an evidence-based policy judgement that draws on available modelling and balances the policy feasibility and appetite for reform. Some studies even indicate that these effects may be stronger when father-specific entitlements extend beyond six weeks²⁴.

20 A. Patnaik (2019). Reserving time for daddy: The consequences of fathers’ quotas. *Journal of Labor economics*, 37(4), 1009-1059. OECD, *Paid leave for fathers*.

21 A. Patnaik (2019). Reserving time for daddy: The consequences of fathers’ quotas. *Journal of Labor economics*, 37(4), 1009-1059. S. André, N. Cammu and E. Meuleman, Fathers, Families, and Society: A Two-Decade Systematic Literature Review on the Contexts and Consequences of Paternity and Parental Leave for Fathers, *Social Sciences*, 40, 3 (2025) pp.1-25.

22 Centre for Progressive Policy, Pregnant Then Screwed, and Women in Data (2023). *Leave in the lurch: Paternity leave, gender equality and the UK economy* [report]. https://www.progressive-policy.net/downloads/files/CPP_Paternity-Leave-report_June-2023.pdf

23 J. Clifton-Sprigg, A. Hunt, J. Bailey and L. Zelezetskii (2025, June). Costs and benefits of improved leave for fathers in the first year: Too good to ignore. In APPG for Flexible and Family Friendly Working. University of Bath.

24 Bünning, M. (2015). What happens after the ‘daddy months’? Fathers’ involvement in paid work, childcare, and housework after taking parental leave in Germany. *European Sociological Review*, 31(6), 738–745



In this section, we review the evidence on what enhanced and earmarked leave for fathers can mean for the UK economy, including direct economic gains and wider social benefits that may indirectly generate economic gains. Given that many of these outcomes operate through a central pathway – fathers actually taking leave and becoming more involved in care – we begin with evidence on paternity leave taking and caregiving, before turning to the economic and social outcomes that may follow through this and other pathways.

Before turning to the evidence, it’s worth noting that this report anticipates some questions likely to arise: whether the international evidence transfers to the UK, who benefits most, the impact on small employers, and the role of childcare, gender norms and workplace culture. These are addressed directly in the Stress-Testing the Outcomes section, drawing together evidence presented throughout the following part of this report. We also address these challenges further in the Conclusion section as well as in Appendix 3 (Designing Leave that Works), where we identify key elements that need to be put in place in order for meaningful change to happen.

INCREASING FATHERS’ INVOLVEMENT IN CHILDCARE

A key way in which extended and better-paid paternity leave can benefit families and society is by increasing fathers’ involvement in the household. We present this section first because its effects ripple outwards into the economic and social outcomes discussed later – greater father involvement is not just one benefit among several, but a driver of the others.

Studies have shown how early involvement in childcare helps fathers to become present, confident carers throughout their children’s lives.²⁵ This then has several knock-on effects on mothers, the economy, the family and children’s outcomes. Several studies demonstrate the main effect is that fathers who take leave after birth are more involved in the ongoing care of their child than those who did not.

Table 2. Summary table of causal evidence on the impact of parental leave for fathers on father’s involvement in care

FINDING	HEADLINE FINDINGS	NO. OF STUDIES	SCOPE OF STUDIES
Increase in fathers' care	Fathers who take leave consistently increase their childcare involvement across countries.	13	Sweden (Duvander & Johansson, 2012, 2019), Norway (Duvander et al, 2020), Germany (Kluve & Tamm, 2013; Schober, 2014; Büning, 2015; Tamm, 2019), Quebec/Canada (Patnaik, 2019; Wray, 2020)
Reduced socio-economic inequality in leave taking	Well-paid, earmarked quotas drove large take-up in Quebec, Germany and the Nordics, whereas the UK's low-paid, transferable Shared Parental Leave produced no detectable uptake increase. Swedish reserved months raised take-up, but a financial equality bonus without reserved leave had no effect.	6	Sweden (Duvander & Johansson, 2012; Duvander & Fahlén, 2025), Quebec/Canada (Patnaik, 2019), Denmark (Andersen, 2018) and the UK (Clifton-Sprigg et al, 2025)

For example, Tanaka and Waldfogel, using data from the UK Millennium Cohort Study, found that fathers who took leave after birth were significantly more involved in feeding, bathing, changing and getting up at night than those who took no time off.²⁶ They found that fathers who took any leave after the birth are 25% more likely to change nappies, 19% more likely to feed the baby, and 19% more likely to get up at night when the child is eight months to 12 months.

²⁵ S. André, N. Cammu and E. Meuleman, Fathers, Families, and Society: A Two-Decade Systematic Literature Review on the Contexts and Consequences of Paternity and Parental Leave for Fathers, *Social Sciences*, 40, 3 (2025) pp.1-25. E. Banister, B. Kerrane and J. Wilson, Legacies of fathers’ solo leave: Dual-career couples and dynamic linked care(ers), *Human Relations* (2026).

²⁶ S. Tanaka and J. Waldfogel, Effects of parental leave and work hours on fathers’ involvement with their babies: Evidence from the millennium cohort study. *Community, Work and Family*, 10, 4, (2007) 409-426.

Paternity leave taking in the first year of a child's life has been linked to increased father's involvement in child care even after the leave ended, and an adjustment in their employment patterns, in the later parts of a child's life.²⁷ There are several other examples of such increase in father's involvement after the take-up of parental leave in the early days of a child's life, based on evidence from countries outside the UK.

For example, Schober found effects on fathers' childcare involvement following leave taking in Germany.²⁸ Comparing fathers whose children were born before and after the 2007 reform, she found that fathers increased their average weekday childcare hours by 0.6 hours in the first year, and by 0.44 hours at 18-30 months, relative to fathers whose children were born before the reform. This first-year effect was largely explained by whether fathers actually took leave: fathers who took some leave contributed 2.45 hours more to weekday childcare than those who did not. Moreover, Bünning found that under the same reform in Germany, fathers reallocated time from paid work to family after taking parental leave.²⁹ For example, on average, fathers reduced paid work by about four hours per week and increased childcare by about one hour per weekday.

Duvander and Johansson contribute the long Scandinavian perspective on incremental quota expansions.³⁰ Their 2019 paper looking at Sweden specifically asks whether father's care “spills over” – ie whether taking leave in early life predicts more involved caregiving later – and finds evidence of persistent behavioural changes on fathers' behaviour beyond the leave period itself.

In Quebec, fathers subject to the earmarked “daddy quota” spent an additional 0.5 hours on housework on weekdays and 1.4-1.6 additional hours on childcare at weekends (measured one to three years after the leave period ended – medium-term effects).³¹ Thus, the 2006 reform led to fathers spending 15 minutes more per day on housework, and 36 minutes per day more at home in general.

It is worth noting that the length of leave and type of leave make a difference. A study by Nepomnyaschy and Waldfogel based on data from the US, found that the effect only kicks in when fathers take two or more weeks' leave.³² Other studies point to different lengths as being key, with one month alone – namely without mothers or birthing parents³³ – and two months³⁴ being suggested in different studies.

27 H. Norman, M. Elliot and D. Vanchugova, How important is early paternal engagement? Deriving longitudinal measures of fathers' childcare engagement and exploring structural relationships with prior engagement and employment hours, *Journal of Family Issues*, 45, 11, (2024) pp.2751-2776. H. Norman, M. Elliot and C. Fagan, Which fathers are the most involved in taking care of their toddlers in the UK? An investigation of the predictors of paternal involvement, *Community, Work and Family*, 17, 2, (2014) pp.163-180.

28 P.S. Schober, Parental Leave and Domestic Work of Mothers and Fathers: A Longitudinal Study of Two Reforms in West Germany, *Journal of Social Policy*, 43, 2, (2014) pp.351-372.

29 M. Bünning (2015). What happens after the 'daddy months'? Fathers' involvement in paid work, childcare, and housework after taking parental leave in Germany, *European Sociological Review*, 31(6), 738-748.

30 A.Z. Duvander and M. Johansson, What are the effects of reforms promoting fathers' parental leave use? *Journal of European Social Policy*, 22, 3, (2012). A.Z. Duvander and M. Johansson, Does Fathers' Care Spill Over? Evaluating Reforms in the Swedish Parental Leave Program, *Feminist Economics*, 25, 2, (2019) 67-89.

31 A. Patnaik, Reserving time for daddy: The consequences of fathers' quotas, *Journal of Labor economics*, 37,4 (2019) 1009-1059.

32 L. Nepomnyaschy and J. Waldfogel, Paternity leave and fathers' involvement with their young children, *Community, Work & Family*, 10, 4, (2007) 427-453.

33 P. Romero-Balsas, G. Meil and J. Rogero-Garcia, Policemen on Leave Alone in Spain. A Rift in Hegemonic Masculinity?, *Men and Masculinities*, 24, 3, (2021) pp.483-500.

34 T. Reimer and B. Pfau-Effinger, Different types of parental leave use by German fathers and their engagement in childcare in subsequent years, *Social Policy Issues*, 48; (2020) pp.-7-26.

Studies have also indicated that solo leave also has a much bigger impact on increasing father's involvement in care in the later years of the child's life, than leave taken at the same time as the birthing partner/mother.³⁵ What is clear is that longer duration, and type of leave, shape behaviours later on.

Table 3. Summary table of causal evidence on the economic impact of paternity leave/parental leave for fathers

FINDING	HEADLINE FINDINGS	NO. OF STUDIES	SCOPE OF STUDIES
Expanding women's labour force participation and earnings	Adequately paid, non-transferable paternity leave ("daddy quotas"/father-reserved parental leave) increases mothers' labour force participation, reduces part-time work, and increases maternal earnings. Effects are strongest where leave is well paid and non-transferable.	7	<i>Studies of reforms in Denmark (Andersen, 2018; Druedahl et al, 2019), Canada/Quebec (Dunatchik & Özcan, 2021; Patnaik, 2019), Germany (Kluge & Schmitz, 2018; Frodermann et al, 2023), Spain (Farré & González, 2019)</i>
Reducing employee turnover	Mothers returned to previous employers at significantly higher rates post-reform; employers rewarded this continuity with improved job quality, suggesting well-designed leave reduces employee turnover costs	1	Germany (Kluge & Schmitz, 2018)
Reduction in gender gaps in employment and wages	Maternal participation/full-time work rose ~3-5pp in Quebec under the reform of "daddy's quota"; Danish fathers' quotas raised women's relative income share ~1.2pp for up to eight years; Denmark's 2022 reform also cut the post-leave earnings gap by 2.8pp and hours gap by 1.4pp in year two (~14% of the child penalty).	9	<i>Denmark (Andersen, 2018; Druedahl et al, 2019; Kleven et al, 2026, working paper), Quebec/Canada (Dunatchik & Özcan, 2021), Germany (Kluge & Schmitz, 2018; Frodermann, Wrohlich & Zucco, 2023), Spain (Farré & González, 2019), ten European countries including the UK (Bacheron, 2021, working paper); and 38 OECD countries (CPP et al, 2023)</i>
Reducing employer discrimination penalties	Mothers taking shorter-than-norm leave receive an 11-12% hiring and pay premium. Equal leave division (six months each) minimises the combined household hiring/wage penalty (for fathers taking leave) compared to the typical asymmetric split.	1	<i>Studies of reforms in Poland (Cukrowska-Torzewska et al, 2025, working paper), the US (Petts et al, 2025)</i>

35 M. O'Brien and K. Wall (eds), *Comparative Perspectives on Work-Life Balance and Gender Equality: Fathers on leave alone*. London: Springer. (2016). Open Access.

ECONOMIC IMPACTS

Extended and well-paid parental leave for fathers and second parents generates measurable economic returns through multiple channels. First and foremost, it enhances the mother's labour market participation and reduces turnover and work absences for women and men. Furthermore, it benefits the economy indirectly through improved wellbeing and other social outcomes. The indirect outcomes via wellbeing are presented in the next section.

MOTHER'S LABOUR FORCE PARTICIPATION AND PRODUCTIVITY

There is substantial evidence that generously paid paternity leave and the subsequent higher uptake of leave can help increase labour force participation of mothers, enhancing mothers' ability to be employed full time. This is particularly important as women's employment rates in the UK fall from above 90% to below 75% around childbirth, while employed mothers' average weekly working hours decline from around 40 to fewer than 30 hours a week following childbirth.³⁶ Such negative effects on women's employment and earnings become even more pronounced as the number of children they have increases.³⁷ Women's Budget Group/CLES estimate that women's lower labour market engagement costs the economy nearly £100 billion a year in lost economic output, more than the entire contribution of the UK financial services sector.³⁸

Therefore, adequately long and paid father-reserved leave addresses not only gender employment and pay gaps, but also potential labour and skill shortages in the labour market, benefiting the economy.

Paternity leave increases mothers' labour force participation through several interlinked mechanisms. First, by redistributing **care within the household** during the critical early months, as evidenced by the previous section, fathers leave taking enables mothers to return to paid work when they choose, and on better terms, while reducing long-term unemployment, as well as earning and progression penalties.³⁹ This is especially true as increases in care demands post-childbirth is one of the main reasons why mothers drop out of the labour market or move to part-time jobs post-childbirth.⁴⁰ These effects persist beyond the leave period itself, as fathers who take longer leave remain more involved in childcare and housework years later, reducing the domestic burden and "mental load" that constrain mothers' capacity to work longer hours, pursue promotions or accept new roles.⁴¹ Second, parental leave can help shift their gender role attitudes that

³⁶ A. Andrew, O. Bandiera, M. Costa Dias and C. Landais (2021). The careers and time use of mothers and fathers. Institute for Fiscal Studies. Available at: <https://ifs.org.uk/publications/careers-and-time-use-mothers-and-fathers>, 21.

³⁷ Office for National Statistics (ONS), released 3 October 2025, ONS website, statistical bulletin, The impact of motherhood on monthly employee earnings and employment status, England: April 2014 to December 2022.

³⁸ Women's Budget Group & Centre for Local Economic Strategies (CLES). Revealed: £94.9bn per year – the cost of barriers to paid work for women... and it's rising. Women's Budget Group. Available at: <https://www.wbg.org.uk/article/88-7bn-per-year-the-cost-of-barriers-to-paid-work-for-women/>

³⁹ A. Patnaik, Reserving time for daddy: The consequences of fathers' quotas, *Journal of Labor Economics*, 37, 4, (2019), 1009-1059. Tanaka and Waldfogel, Effects of parental leave and work hours on fathers.

⁴⁰ M. Costa Dias, R. Joyce and F. Parodi (2018). The gender pay gap in the UK: children and experience in work. London, Institute for Fiscal Studies. W. Olsen, V. Gash, S. Kim and M. Zhang (2018). The Gender Pay Gap in the UK: Evidence from the UKHLS, Research Report Number DFE-RR804. London, Department for Education, Government Equalities Office.

⁴¹ Banister et al., Legacies of fathers' solo leave.

may support maternal employment even further.⁴² Finally, well-paid earmarked leave for fathers' changes **employer behaviour and attitudes**: when leave taking is normalised across both parents, the perception of women, especially mothers, as less committed employees or more likely to experience career interruptions – and the hiring, pay and promotion penalties that follow – is weakened.⁴³

Three studies model the potential economic output of introducing longer, generously paid paternity leave to the UK, with a focus on mothers' increased economic engagement as the driving factor.

In a UK study, the Centre for Progressive Policy (CPP)'s modelling indicates that closing gender employment gaps through extended paternity leave could increase economic output by **£23 billion (1% of GDP)**.⁴⁴ Separately, CPP's cross-country analysis (OECD data, 38 countries, 1975-2020) found that offering more than six weeks of paid paternity leave is associated with a **4 percentage points smaller gender pay gap and a 3.7 percentage points smaller labour force participation gap**, compared with countries offering less than six weeks. Longer leave for fathers, alongside well-paid entitlements, supports mothers' employment, reduces gender pay gaps, and subsequently boosts productivity across sectors.

The Joseph Rowntree Foundation estimates that extending statutory paternity leave to six weeks at 90% of average weekly earnings (capped at £1,200 per week) could deliver a net positive through women's increased labour market participation.⁴⁵

The study calculated that it would cost the HMRC approximately £1.1 billion to provide fathers six weeks of 90% income replacement leave (capped at £1,200 a week). Additional tax revenues generated by higher female employment and working hours would reduce the net cost to the Treasury to around £220 million.

⁴² A. Andrew, O. Bandiera, M. Costa-Dias and C. Landais, *Women and men at work* (Institute for Fiscal Studies, 2021).

⁴³ S. J. Correll, S. Benard and I. Paik, Getting a job: Is there a motherhood penalty?, *American Journal of Sociology*, 112, 5, (2007), 1297-1338. E. Cukrowska-Torzevska, A. Kasperska, A. Matysiak and G. Kaufman, *Employers' discrimination against fathers and mothers taking parental leave: Evidence from a choice experiment* (Working Papers No. 2025-27). (University of Warsaw 2025). Mandel and Semyonov, *A Welfare State Paradox* pp.1910-1949.

⁴⁴ Centre for Progressive Policy, *Pregnant Then Screwed*, and *Women in Data*. Leave in the lurch: Paternity leave, gender equality and the UK economy (2023).

⁴⁵ L. Woodruff, *Improving statutory paternity leave would benefit families and the economy* (report). Joseph Rowntree Foundation, 2025).

According to its calculations, the leave would deliver a net annual **economic gain of £2.68 billion**, reflecting a £5.5 billion gain due to mothers' return to the labour market, offset by a £2.8 billion costs for paternity leave taking. The economic gain would most benefit lower-income households, meaning paternity leave could therefore also tackle social inequalities across households.

Clifton-Sprigg et al conducted a cost-benefit analysis specifically calibrated to the UK context, modelling an expansion from two to six weeks of paternity leave paid at 90% of average weekly earnings.⁴⁶ They show how policies of varying payment generosity (capped vs uncapped) can yield different results, and they advocate for six weeks of parental leave for fathers paid at 90% with no cap. They estimate that in case of 74% take-up of six weeks of paternity leave at 90% average weekly earnings, "the net social benefit arising solely from the labour market effects is approximately £672 million: **anticipated female labour force participation increases by 4.5% and hours worked (conditional on employment) increase by 4%**, bringing GDP gains and additional tax revenue. This is conditional upon fathers using these weeks strictly for childcare, enabling mothers' earlier return to work or increased working hours. The policy must therefore encourage sequential take-up for at least some of the six weeks." Under this scenario, with 74% take-up of eligible fathers, the policy generates net total social benefits of £12.8 billion per year, driven primarily by improved maternal labour market attachment, but also parental wellbeing gains and reduced family separation, though the scale of benefits depends heavily on how many fathers actually take leave. The benefits, relative to the government costs, are the largest in medium (74% take-up of eligible fathers) and high (96% take-up of eligible fathers) estimate scenarios.⁴⁷

Studies outside the UK similarly found that more generous leave for fathers is associated with beneficial labour market outcomes for mothers. There are broad findings, such as an analysis which found that in OECD countries, longer and more generously paid paternity and parental leave entitlements for fathers are associated with higher father uptake and tend to correlate with narrower gender employment gaps.⁴⁸ Consistent across several rigorous causal studies, paternity leave – when well designed and financially generous – is widely found to improve mothers' employment outcomes.

Farré and González evaluated Spain's 2007 introduction of two weeks of paternity leave. They found that the introduction of two weeks of paternity leave quota in Spain increased mothers' **labour force participation by 4.5%** six months after childbirth, with significant impact to their incomes up to two years after childbirth.⁴⁹ This rise in maternal labour force attachment may have been driven by the reform's effect on fathers' participation in childcare.

46 J. Clifton-Sprigg, A. Hunt, L. Zelezetskii and J. Bailey, *Costs and benefits of improved leave for fathers in the first year: too good to ignore* (IPR Policy Brief, 2025b). Addendum November 2025: <https://www.bath.ac.uk/publications/costs-and-benefits-of-improved-leave-for-fathers-in-the-first-year-too-good-to-ignore/attachments/addendum-to-six-weeks-for-dads-proposal.pdf>

47 The direct annual cost to the government for paying fathers on leave, including tax transfer effects, is £1.3 billion. Annual costs to businesses are £0.12 billion (reduced from £0.42 billion in the original report, following the addendum's update to the Small and Medium Employer reclaim rate). The total quantifiable gain to leave-taking households amounts to £14.9 billion per year. Of this, wellbeing gains – measured through improvements in life satisfaction – account for approximately £12.2 billion, labour market gains from mothers' increased employment and hours worked amount to £0.67 billion, and reduced family separation accounts for a further £0.64 billion. From Clifton-Sprigg et al. (2025), *Costs and benefits of improved leave for fathers in the first year: Too good to ignore*, and Clifton-Sprigg et al. (2025), *Addendum to Six weeks for dads proposal*.

48 Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development. *Paid leave for fathers: Recent OECD policy trends*. (OECD, 2025).

49 L. Farré and L. González, *Does paternity leave reduce fertility?*, *Journal of Public Economics*, 172 (2019) pp.52-66.

The authors' time-use analysis provides suggestive evidence that, while the paternity leave policy did not affect fathers' labour market attachment, it may have led to a **persistent increase in childcare**, with fathers eligible for paternity leave spending almost an hour more per day on childcare compared with ineligible fathers.

Quebec's 2006 Parental Insurance Plan introduced a well-paid (70% earnings replacement), non-transferable "daddy quota" of five weeks (or three weeks with 75% earnings replacement). These paternal weeks were meant to help support fathers in the care of their young children and to signal to employers that parental responsibilities and leave are for their male staff too.

Dunatchik and Özcan found that Quebec mothers who were subject to the policy were about **5 percentage points more likely to participate in the labour force and work full time**, 5 percentage points less likely to work part time, and 4 percentage points less likely to be unemployed relative to the counterfactual.⁵⁰ Patnaik found that employed mothers when exposed to the policy were likely to spend 80 minutes more physically at the workplace and be 5.4 percentage points more likely to be full-time employed.⁵¹

Andersen used administrative data from Denmark across five natural experiments and found that reforms increasing economic incentives for fathers to take leave – especially the 1997 wage-compensation mandate in the private sector (close to 100% earnings replacement for many; mirroring what took place in the public sector already) and the 2002 reform (essentially prolonging the parental leave) – had a positive causal effect on mothers' incomes.⁵² Mothers' **income grew by 2.05 pp in one year and +1.77 in three years** and significantly decreased the within-household gender wage gap. Crucially, **reforms that merely created entitlement without adequate pay did not move the needle**.

More recent evidence from Denmark supports this further. Using a purpose-built survey of nearly 40,000 parents linked to administrative records, fielded both before and after Denmark's 2022 reform (which expanded earmarked paternity leave from two to eleven weeks), Kleven et al found the earnings gender gap fell by 34pp and the hours gap by 33pp in year 1, reflecting the reallocation of leave.⁵³

More importantly, in year 2 (after leave has ended for both parents), the earnings gap fell by a further 2.8pp and the hours gap by 1.4pp, indicating **a long-lasting and potentially compounding impact** of leaves on long-term labour market outcomes.

50 A. Dunatchik and B. Özcan, *Reducing mommy penalties with daddy quotas*, *Journal of European Social Policy*, 31, 2 (2021) 175-191.

51 A. Patnaik (2019), *Reserving time for daddy: The consequences of fathers' quotas*, *Journal of Labor Economics*, 37(4), 1009-1059.

52 S.H. Andersen, *Paternity Leave and the Motherhood Penalty: New Causal Evidence*, *Journal of Marriage and Family*, 80(5) (2018).

53 H. Kleven, C. Landais, A.S. Lassen, P. Rosenbaum, H. Steingrimsdóttir and J.E. Søgaaard (2026). *Expanding Paternity Leave: Effects on Beliefs, Norms, and Gender Gaps* (No. w34862). National Bureau of Economic Research.

Since the reform has no direct effect on incentives in year 2, these effects are attributable to behavioural and attitudinal change. A mediation analysis suggests that more than half of the year 2 earnings and hours effects can be explained by **changed beliefs around whose role it is to care and carry out the breadwinning**. To give scale: child penalties in Denmark amount to roughly 20% in earnings, meaning the reform reduced child-related gender gaps by about 14%.

Two studies in Germany look at the impact of the introduction of two “daddy months” (two months of earmarked leave). Kluve and Schmitz focused on the medium run – years 3-5 after childbirth – following Germany’s “daddy months”. They found mothers’ employment probability is significantly higher in this window, driven by gains in part-time work, and that job continuity improves substantially: mothers return to their pre-birth employer at higher rates, contributing to career disruption.⁵⁴ Frodermann, Wrohlich and Zucco added a long-run earnings perspective, also finding that the daddy months “enabled the mothers’ re-entry into the labour force. However, they found that the daddy months had the **strongest effect in couples where the mother had high pre-birth earnings** – these were the couples where fathers were most responsive to the earmarking incentive, and they were also the couples where mothers showed the largest subsequent earnings recovery.⁵⁵ This is both encouraging (large returns in high-earning couples) and a potential equity concern (lower-earning families see less benefit). To note, this evidence comes from Germany, which already has earnings-related pay for the leave, and the equity gap in outcomes persists, which shows that adequate pay solves the access problem but not the *outcomes* problem.

This outcome gap in Germany is likely driven by factors pay design alone cannot fix: lower-earning mothers are more likely to be in insecure, part-time or lower-status roles with less to return to, and less bargaining power to negotiate flexible re-entry. Most importantly, **earnings-related pay is what makes taking leave financially viable at all**; without it, as in the UK’s current flat-rate system, low-income fathers are effectively priced out regardless of any quota.

Bacheron in her working paper takes a broader cross-European view, using pseudo-panel data (a way of approximating panel data, which is repeated observations of the same individuals over time) from the EU Labour Force Survey across ten countries over 1998-2016.⁵⁶

54 J. Kluve and S. Schmitz, Back to Work: Parental Benefits and Mothers’ Labor Market Outcomes in the Medium Run, *ILR Review*, 71, 1, (2018) 143-173.

55 C. Frodermann, K. Wrohlich and A. Zucco, Parental leave policy and long-run earnings of mothers, *Labour Economics*, 80, (2023) 102296.

56 J. Bacheron, *The impact of paternity leave on mothers’ employment in Europe* (2021). Working paper.

She found that paternity leave is associated with increases in mothers’ employment rates in eight of the ten countries studied, with **long-run employment gains of up to 17% and increases in average hours worked of 2-4%**. She identifies two mechanisms: a *direct effect* (fathers at home reduces mothers’ time constraint) and a *general effect* (paternity leave normalises shared parenting and reduces employer discrimination against mothers). Notably, for the UK specifically, both employment rates and hours worked increased following the introduction of paternity leave, placing it alongside Italy and the Netherlands in showing gains at both the extensive (“more mothers worked for pay”) and intensive (“longer hours”) margins, namely more mothers worked for pay and longer hours. Greece and Portugal showed no significant effect.

Cukrowska-Torzewska et al, in a working paper studying Poland found that mothers who took shorter-than-average leave (six vs twelve months of well-paid leave) gained a premium in hiring and pay.⁵⁷ Because Poland’s average leave is around twelve months, a six-month maternity leave implies that the remaining leave was likely partially taken by the father – in other words, these were households where the parents split leave roughly equally. The authors found that this equal split was the best outcome for the household’s overall career trajectory. Taken together with Bacheron’s findings, this points to two distinct mechanisms behind paternity leave’s effect on mother’s employment: a **direct effect**, where fathers taking leave frees up mothers’ time and enables them to return to or increase paid work; and a **general effect**, where the wider normalisation of shared parenting reduces employer stigma and discrimination against mothers in hiring and pay.

REDUCING EMPLOYEE TURNOVER AND ABSENCES

Extending and adequately remunerating parental leave has clear economic benefits for employers. High-quality leave policies improve employee wellbeing, strengthen retention and enhance productivity.⁵⁸ Paternity leave provision specifically has been shown to increase the retention of mothers by their employers.⁵⁹ In Norway, the four-week “daddy’s quota” introduced in 1993 (100% of the previous wages) cut mothers’ sickness absence by 1.3pp in the four years around the birth. These gains were highest in families in which fathers were able to take leave beyond the quota – not just the quota alone.⁶⁰

Wider improvements in parental wellbeing may also have implications for employers through sickness absence and productivity, although these pathways are discussed in detail in the following section. Data from Denmark indicates that improving employee mental wellbeing significantly increases output and reduces sickness-related absence.⁶¹ In the UK, survey evidence suggests that 53% of women and 63% of men are not mentally ready to return to work after parental leave.⁶² Policies that provide well-paid leave and support equitable sharing of

57 E. Cukrowska-Torzewska et al., *Employers’ discrimination against fathers and mothers taking parental leave*. Working paper.

58 A.A. Brenøe, S. Canaan, N.A. Harmon and H.N. Royer, Is parental leave costly for firms and coworkers? *Journal of Labor Economics*, 42, 4, (2024), 1135-1174. A. Bassanini and D. Venn, The Impact of Labour Market Policies on Productivity in OECD Countries. *International Productivity Monitor*, 17 (2008).

59 Kluve and Schmitz, Back to Work. Frodermann et al., Parental leave policy and long-run earnings of mothers.

60 E. Bratberg and G. Naz, Does Paternity Leave Affect Mothers’ Sickness Absence?, *European Sociological Review*, 30, 4, (2014) 500-511.

61 Z.I. Santini et al., Economics of mental well-being: A prospective study estimating associated health care costs and sickness benefit transfers in Denmark, *The European Journal of Health Economics*, 22, 7, (2021) 1053-1065.

62 Centre for Progressive Policy et al., *Leave in the lurch*.

care can therefore improve parental mental health, reduce absenteeism, and deliver tangible productivity gains for employers.

SOCIETAL IMPACTS: INDIRECT ECONOMIC BENEFITS

The direct economic benefits of introducing well-paid earmarked paternity leave are only part of the picture.

Enhanced paternity leave contributes to additional indirect social benefits that strengthen society and benefit the economy through supporting stronger and happier families, enhancing parental and child wellbeing, and through improving children’s psychological and cognitive development.

Increased and well-paid paternity leave can create a lasting impact on fathers’ likelihood of sharing care, which in turn makes families more resilient, can increase fertility and improve child development.⁶³ These societal impacts themselves can lead to longer-term economic gains, as they develop human capital and create a society less reliant on government expenditure on health and social services. Clifton-Sprigg et al’s study estimates annual net social benefits of over £12.8 billion generated from increasing paternity leave, is partly driven by parental wellbeing gains, and reduced family separation.⁶⁴

Table 4. Summary table of causal evidence on the social impact of paternity leave/parental leave for fathers

FINDING	HEADLINE FINDINGS	NO. OF STUDIES	SCOPE OF STUDIES
Stronger, healthier and happier families	Parental leave was linked to better maternal health and more stable families, with some variation in partnership outcomes depending on the couples' household arrangements (more traditional or egalitarian).	10	Norway (Bratberg & Naz, 2014; Hart, Andersen & Drange, 2022), Sweden (Avdic & Karimi, 2018), France (Barry et al, 2023), United Kingdom (Humphreys et al, 2025), Norway, Sweden, Denmark, Iceland, Finland and Germany together (Korsgren & van Lent, 2022), United States (Petts et al, 2020b), Iceland (Ólafsson & Steingrimsdóttir, 2020) and 27 European countries (Morales, 2025)
Fertility	Parental leave had mixed effects on fertility, increasing higher-order births in some contexts but delaying or reducing others.	6	Spain (Farré & González, 2019; Regueiro-Ons et al, 2024), Norway and Sweden (Cools et al, 2015; Duvander et al, 2020), Nordic comparative evidence (Duvander et al, 2019) and Norway (Hart et al, 2022)
Improved child development	Parental leave leads to better educational outcomes and is linked to improved child development. Benefits are associated with fathers' involvement and longer leave taking.	5	Norway and Sweden (Cools et al, 2015; Avdic et al, 2023, working paper; Mikkelsen & Peter, 2024), Australia, Denmark, UK and US (Huerta et al, 2014) and Singapore evidence (Li & Yeung, 2025)

63 For a review of the evidence on this see H. Chung (2021). Shared care, father's involvement in care and family well-being outcomes: Literature review (Research report). London, UK Cabinet Office, Government Equalities Office.

64 Clifton-Sprigg et al., Costs and benefits of improved leave for fathers in the first year.

HEALTHIER PARENTS

Well-designed leave for fathers can generate longer-term public value by improving family health and wellbeing, and reducing some of the pressures that lead to demand for health and social services. Paternity leave uptake supports not only their own health, but also that of their partners. When fathers take a meaningful period of leave, they can take a greater share of infant care and housework, giving mothers more time to recover physically and psychologically after childbirth, and fathers can also get more connected to their children. These outcomes may reduce the use of health and social support services.

Physical health

Generous leave for fathers can improve parents’ physical health, particularly for mothers. When fathers or partners return to work within days of childbirth, mothers may lose essential support during a period of profound physical and mental vulnerability.⁶⁵

Causal evidence from Norway supports this. Bratberg and Naz found that, among families in which fathers took leave beyond the four-week period reserved specifically for them, mothers’ subsequent sickness absence at work fell by approximately 1.3pp.⁶⁶ Although they did not specifically consider a six-week threshold, it is consistent with wider evidence suggesting that fathers’ actual take-up and the duration of leave may matter for the benefits experienced by mothers.

The 2012 Swedish “double days” reform, allowed parents to take full-time paid parental leave simultaneously for up to 30 additional days during the child’s first year; fathers could use these days intermittently while mothers were also on leave. Persson and Rossin-Slater found that this reform reduced mothers’ childbirth-related inpatient or specialist outpatient visits by 1.5 percentage points, equivalent to a 14% reduction, and reduced antibiotic prescriptions by 1.9 percentage points, equivalent to an 11% reduction.⁶⁷ Effects were stronger for mothers with pre-birth medical histories.

Overall, these studies provide evidence that fathers’ access to leave can improve maternal health after childbirth, although the evidence base remains smaller than for other outcomes such as fathers’ caregiving or mothers’ employment.

Existing causal studies are also concentrated in Nordic countries, leaving greater uncertainty about the size of these effects in the UK and about which aspects of leave design – including duration, pay and whether parents take leave together or separately – are most important.

65 D. de Vaus, M. Gray, L. Qu, D. Stanton (2017). The economic consequences of divorce in six OECD countries. *Australian Journal of Social Issues*, 52(2), 180-199. doi:10.1002/ajs413.

66 Bratberg and Naz, Does Paternity Leave Affect Mothers’ Sickness Absence? (2014).

67 P. Persson and M. Rossin-Slater, When dad can stay home: fathers’ workplace flexibility and maternal health, *American Economic Journal: Applied Economics*, 16, 4, (2024). 186-219.

Mental health

Paternity leave can improve parents’ mental health. This is particularly relevant for the UK, given the substantial economic and social costs currently associated with unaddressed perinatal mental health problems. At present, these problems impose substantial costs on the NHS and social services (£1.2 billion per year), with wider social costs estimated at £8.1 billion for each annual cohort of births.⁶⁸ For fathers specifically, evidence suggests that mental health difficulties can be particularly acute between three and six months post-partum,⁶⁹ a period by which current UK paternity leave has long ended.⁷⁰ Survey evidence from the UK also highlights how widespread this issue is: 17% of parents report experiencing a new mental health problem in the two years following the birth of their youngest child.⁷¹

The existing evidence is currently stronger and more consistent for mothers’ mental health – particularly with longer, better-paid leave – while evidence on the direct mental health benefits for fathers themselves remains more limited and mixed.⁷² For example, Sweden’s 2012 “double days” reform, explained more in the previous section, increased fathers’ use of post-baseline leave by 3.9-5.9 percentage points in the first 60-180 days after childbirth, and reduced mothers’ anti-anxiety prescriptions by 0.3 percentage points (a 26% reduction). These effects were the strongest for mothers with pre-birth medical histories.

There is little strong causal evidence on the effects of leave on fathers’ own mental health. A number of correlational studies exist on this question, but they often produce conflicting results. Some found a positive association between paternity leave take-up and their own mental health,⁷³ others found no effect, or they found that the benefit accrues to mothers rather than fathers.⁷⁴ As mentioned earlier in this report, correlational studies, and particularly those of health outcomes, should be treated with caution and not read as establishing a causal effect. Such studies are vulnerable to, for example, reverse causality and selection bias: fathers who are already better supported, in more secure work, or in better mental health to begin with may simply be more likely to take leave, rather than leave taking causing the improvement.

Overall, this remains an area where more robust evidence is needed. Causal research to date shows clear benefits for mothers’ mental health; correlational studies suggest fathers mental health may benefit too, but this has not yet been confirmed using adequate designs that would let us rule out selection effects.

68 A. Bauer, M. Parsonage, M. Knapp, V. Iemmi and B. Adelaja. (2014) The Costs of Perinatal Mental Health Problems. London: Centre for Mental Health and London School of Economics.

69 C. Gatrell, The ‘Paternal body’: Reviewing the corporeal impact of new fatherhood on employed men, *International Journal of Management Reviews*, 27, 1, (2025) 12-33.

E. Gheyoh Ndzi and A. Holmes, Paternal Leave Entitlement and Workplace Culture: A Key Challenge to Paternal Mental Health, *International Journal of Environmental Research and Public Health*, 20, 8, (2023) 5454.

70 W.-W. Rao, X.-M. Zhu, Q.-Q. Zong, Q. Zhang, B. J. Hall, G. S. Ungvari and Y.-T. Xiang, Prevalence of prenatal and postpartum depression in fathers: A comprehensive meta-analysis of observational surveys, *Journal of Affective Disorders*, 263, (2020), 491-499.

71 Centre for Progressive Policy et al., *Leave in the lurch*, p17.

72 A. Heshmati, H. Honkaniemi and S.P. Juárez (2023). The effect of parental leave on parents’ mental health: a systematic review. *The Lancet Public Health*, 8(1), e57-e75.

73 K.M. Barry, R. Gomajee, X. Benarous, M.N. Dufourg, E. Courtin and M. Melchior (2023). Paternity leave uptake and parental post-partum depression: findings from the ELFE cohort study. *The Lancet Public Health*, 8(1), e15-e27. J. Wang and M.B. Wells (2026). Beyond the 90 reserved days for each parent: Associations between fathers’ parental leave duration and depression symptoms in a Swedish national cohort study. *American Journal of Public Health*, 116(8), 1121-1129. E. Humphreys, S. O’Neill, V. Filippi and E. Courtin (2025). Paternity leave, mental health and wellbeing for new parents: evidence from a national survey in the UK. *SSM-population health*, 30, 101811. L.F. Philpott, J. Goodwin and M.M. Saab (2022). Paternal leave and fathers’ mental health: a rapid literature review. *International Journal of Men’s Social and Community Health*, 5(SP1), 29-49.

74 A. Heshmati, H. Honkaniemi and S.P. Juárez (2023). The effect of parental leave on parents’ mental health: a systematic review. *The Lancet Public Health*, 8(1), e57-e75.



Life satisfaction

Well-designed parental leave reforms are also shown to promote overall life satisfaction for parents. Beyond specific physical and mental-health outcomes, paternity leave may also affect parents’ broader subjective wellbeing. Life satisfaction captures people’s overall evaluation of how their life is going, and is therefore distinct from clinical outcomes such as depression or anxiety. Korsgren and van Lent’s working paper found that earmarked paternity leave reforms increased parents’ overall life satisfaction across multiple European countries, especially mothers’.⁷⁵ This suggests that the benefits of paternity leave may extend beyond specific health outcomes to parents’ broader assessment of their quality of life. And such benefits are not only for fathers themselves but also their partners. However, this may depend less on take-up alone, more on whether the leave is sufficiently long to produce a meaningful redistribution of care.

STRONGER RELATIONSHIPS AND BIGGER FAMILIES

Relationship stability

Paternity leave uptake can benefit the country financially through supporting family stability.^{76/77} Family breakdown was estimated to cost the Exchequer £50 billion+ per year in benefits, housing, legal, social and health costs.⁷⁸ Unequal division of childcare is a leading driver of relationship dissatisfaction and dissolution – not just because of workload, but also perceived unfairness.⁷⁹ Couples who share care report lower parental stress, higher relationship satisfaction, and lower separation risk.⁸⁰ Therefore, even a modest reduction in relationship dissolution has significant fiscal value.

75 Korsgren and van Lent, Earmarked paternity leave and well-being.

76 Relationship Foundation: <https://relationshipsfoundation.org/publications/pressreleases/cost-family-failure-2018-update>

77 M.A. Milkie, S.M. Bianchi, M.J. Mattingly and J.P. Robinson, Gendered division of childrearing: Ideals, realities, and the relationship to parental well-being, *Sex Roles: A Journal of Research*, 47, 1-2, (2002), 21-38.

78 Relationship Foundation: <https://relationshipsfoundation.org/publications/pressreleases/cost-family-failure-2018-update/>

79 M.A. Milkie, S.M. Bianchi, M.J. Mattingly and J.P. Robinson, Gendered division of childrearing: Ideals, realities, and the relationship to parental well-being, *Sex Roles: A Journal of Research*, 47, 1-2, (2002), 21-38.

80 P.S. Schober, Gender equality and outsourcing of domestic work, childbearing, and relationship stability among British couples, *Journal of Family Issues*, 34, 1, (2013), 25-52. L. Ruppner, M. Brandén and J. Turunen, Does unequal housework lead to divorce? Evidence from Sweden, *Sociology*, 52, 1, (2018), 75-94. H. Norman, M. Elliot and C. Fagan, Does fathers’ involvement in childcare and housework affect couples’ relationship stability? *Social Science Quarterly*, 99, 5, (2018), 1599-1613. S. Schieman, L. Ruppner and M. A. Milkie, Who Helps with Homework? Parenting Inequality and Relationship Quality Among Employed Mothers and Fathers, *Journal of Family and Economic Issues*, 39, (2018), 49-65.

Some of the strongest causal evidence on this matter comes from Iceland. For instance, Olafsson and Steingrimsdóttir found that the one month of parental leave earmarked for fathers in Iceland, reduced separation by around 11.6 percentage points five years after birth and 8.9 percentage points 15 years after birth.⁸¹ They found that the paternity leave reform had the strongest impact among couples where the mother has higher, or equal, educational attainment to that of the father.

Using longitudinal US data, Petts et al similarly found that paternity leave taking was associated with a lower risk of relationship dissolution. The predicted probability of dissolution fell from approximately 7.5% among fathers who did not take leave, to 5.6% among those who did.⁸² More recent cross-country evidence points in a similar direction. Morales (still a working paper) conducted a study of 27 European Union member states in a 53-year panel (1971-2023) and found that policies offering at least two weeks of paid paternity leave reduce crude divorce rates by around 0.36 percentage points (approximately 19% of the average crude divorce rate) fifteen years after implementation. This is a sizeable effect considering the average rate of 1.89 divorces per 1,000 people during the period under study. She also found that longer leave entitlements produced larger effects, reducing divorce rates by 0.64 percentage points where paternity leave was at least four weeks long and paid (worth noting that this analysis included fewer countries, since at the time few offered paternity leave of this length).⁸³

However, such benefits may depend on couples' work-family characteristics. Avdic and Karimi's study of Sweden's first father quota (1995, 2002) found that the reform increased separation rates by around 0.9-1.4 percentage points among more traditional couples, particularly those in which the father was the principal breadwinner.⁸⁴ This means that paternity leave uptake may lead to short-term (three-to-five-year observation window in the study) conflict where policy-induced changes in fathers' caregiving roles challenge established household arrangements and gender norms, which can potentially increase relationship instability in these traditional households. Norway's later extension of the father quota from six to ten weeks found no effect on union stability five years after the childbirth.⁸⁵

Overall, the evidence on relationship stability suggests that paternity leave can support more stable relationships, but that effects depend on policy design and couples' existing gender and work-family arrangements.

81 A. Olafsson and H. Steingrimsdóttir, How does daddy at home affect marital stability? *The Economic Journal*, 130(629), (2020). 1471-1500.
82 R. . Petts, D.L. Carlson and C. Knoester, If I [take] leave, will you stay? Paternity leave and relationship stability, *Journal of Social Policy*, 49, 4, (2020b). 829-849.
83 M. Morales, The Impact of Paid Paternity Leave Reforms on Divorce Rates in Europe, (GLO Discussion Paper No. 1659, 2025).
84 D. Avdic and A. Karimi, Modern Family? Paternity Leave and Marital Stability, *American Economic Journal: Applied Economics*, 10, 4, (2018), 283-307
85 R.K. Hart, S.N. Andersen and N. Drange (2022). Effects of extended paternity leave on family dynamics. *Journal of Marriage and Family*, 84(3), 814-839. <https://doi.org/10.1111/jomf.12818>.

Fertility

There has been a growing concern about the falling fertility rates across industrialised countries across the world, including the UK, where fertility rates have fallen to the lowest rate in nearly half a century last year.⁸⁶ The estimated number of children born per woman fell to just under 1.4 for England and Wales in 2025, down from 1.9 in 2010. In this context, **there is growing evidence that increased father-reserved leave may help improve fertility rates of couples.**⁸⁷

One important pathway may be through the division of care within couples. Research on low-fertility contexts, including the UK, widely shows that men's inability to share domestic labour is a key reported cause of why women do not want to have (second) children or get married.⁸⁸

Fathers' access to leave may therefore support fertility where it enables a more equal sharing of care and reduces the anticipated costs of having a/another child. **However, the evidence suggests that these benefits depend substantially on women's employment and earnings, birth order, and the design of the leave policy.**⁸⁹

A key study is the Quebec 2006 reform on parental leave, which combined high earnings replacement (70%) with a non-transferable paternity quota of five weeks. Ang estimates that this reform increased the birth rate in Quebec by 23.5% compared to other Canadian provinces, with effects strongest for second births.⁹⁰ The author noted that some caution is warranted given the many simultaneous family policy changes in Quebec, but the directional evidence is clear.

A subsequent study (still a working paper) by Fitzenberger et al – drawing on linked pension and administrative labour market data for Germany – also confirmed that childbearing rates increased among women with higher earnings following the introduction of the daddy months in 2007. Unexpectedly, this also increased fertility among previously unemployed women who entered employment specifically to qualify for the new earnings-related benefit, demonstrating that the structure of pay shapes fertility incentives across the full income distribution.⁹¹ The increase in fertility may have been due to higher-educated women being able to take leave with the higher level of wage replacement, and therefore having more children, but also indirectly shaping the fertility rate by enhancing men's take-up of leave and involvement in care given their greater bargaining powers and egalitarian gender role attitudes.

86 BBC <https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/articles/cvgzdg23xpgg>, ONS
87 J. Thomas, F. Rowe, P. Williamson, P. et al., The effect of leave policies on increasing fertility: a systematic review, *Humanities and Social Sciences Communication* 9, 262 (2022).
88 V. Leocádio, A.P. Verona and S. Wajman (2025). A review of research of the relationship between gender equity and fertility in low-fertility settings. *Journal of Population Research*, 42(1), 1. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s12546-024-09353-y>
89 A.Z. Duvander, T. Lappegård, S.N. Andersen, Ó. Garðarsdóttir, G. Neyer and I. Viklund (2019). Parental leave policies and continued childbearing in Iceland, Norway, and Sweden. *Demographic Research*, 40, 1501-1528. B. Fitzenberger et al. Changing fertility and heterogeneous motherhood effects: revisiting the effects of a parental benefits reform. (2024). Presented at FBK-IRVAPP.
90 X.L. Ang (2015). The effects of cash transfer fertility incentives and parental leave benefits on fertility and labor supply: Evidence from two natural experiments. *Journal of Family and economic Issues*, 36(2), 263-288.
91 B. Fitzenberger et al. Changing fertility and heterogeneous motherhood effects: revisiting the effects of a parental benefits reform (2024). Presented at FBK-IRVAPP.

Results from Spain demonstrate the importance of an adequate paternity leave for allowing meaningful changes in fathers' behaviour at home to support fertility. Farré and González, studying a 2007 reform introducing a two-week father quota, found a reduction or delay in second births.⁹² By contrast, Regueiro-Ons et al (still a working paper), studying subsequent extensions of this leave (up to eight weeks), found that leave of at four weeks had a sustained positive effect on third and higher-order births: third births increased by around 0.8%, and fourth-or-higher births by around 1.1%, on average. This amounted to roughly 472 additional births over the 20-month post-period.⁹³

Duvander et al found a moderate increase in fertility associated with fathers' use of leave in the Nordic countries.⁹⁴ However it seems strongest in terms of second births. The authors argue that the two-child norm is linked to the norm of engaged fatherhood, while having a third child may reflect a more traditional division of labour.

In summary, the extant evidence indicates that shorter weeks may not be effective in increasing fertility rates; however, longer earmarked weeks for fathers may have positive effects again on higher-order births (2, 3+), most likely mediated through the changes in behaviours of fathers' involvement in childcare and housework as well as potential changes in their labour market behaviours.

BENEFITS FOR CHILDREN

Extending and properly remunerating paternity and parental leave offers significant economic advantages by supporting children's cognitive development, academic achievement, reducing psychological problems and enhancing emotional regulation.⁹⁵ A growing body of causal evidence suggests that paternity leave itself can improve children's outcomes, although effects vary across outcomes and family groups.

Norman and Davies conducted a Millenium Cohort Study analysis of 5,000 two-parent households in England and found a positive association between fathers' early childcare involvement and children's educational attainment in the early years of primary school.⁹⁶ More specifically, fathers who engaged regularly in interactive, educational activities – such as reading, playing games and doing arts and crafts – with their children during the preschool years and at age five were more likely to have children who achieved higher grades at the start of primary school.

92 Farré and González, Does paternity leave reduce fertility? L. Farré and L. González, The effects of paternity leave on fertility and labor market outcomes (No. 10865). (IZA Discussion Papers, 2017).

93 C. Regueiro-Ons, J. Pinilla and B.G. López-Valcárcel, (2024). More father leave, more babies? Father-exclusive parental leave periods and fertility (preprint).

94 A.Z. Duvander, T. Lappegård, S.N. Andersen, Ó. Garðarsdóttir, G. Neyer and I. Viklund, Parental leave policies and continued childbearing in Iceland, Norway, and Sweden, *Demographic Research*, 40, (2019) 1501-1528; A.Z. Duvander, T. Lappegård and M. Johansson, Impact of a reform towards shared parental leave on continued fertility in Norway and Sweden, *Population Research and Policy Review*, 39, 6, (2020) 1205-1229.

95 For a review see H. Chung, *Shared care, father's involvement in care and family well-being outcomes: A literature review* (University of Kent, 2021).

96 H. Norman and J. Davies, *What a difference a dad makes. Paternal Involvement and its Effects on Children's Education*, (PIECE) study, (2023) Available from www.piecestudy.org/toolkit

Examining Norway's 1993 father-quota reform, Cools et al found a modest improvement in children's school performance at age 16.⁹⁷ Even relatively small improvements in educational attainment could have cumulative consequences for later skills, employment and productivity, making father-specific leave a potential investment in the capabilities of the future workforce.

Mikkelsen and Peter studied a Swedish parental leave reform reserving one month of leave for fathers, and found that it increased the probability of girls doing a maths-intensive programme in upper secondary education, but no effect was found on boys.⁹⁸ The authors argue that girls were affected by early experience of non-normative parenting. Avdic et al also studied Swedish leave reform and found that it increased father-son persistence in cognitive outcomes by around 30% – namely the father's cognitive ability became more strongly predictive of the son's later school performance after the reform.⁹⁹ However, among lower-educated families, the reform reduced the school-leaving GPA of sons.

Furthermore, recent causal studies show that the impact of paternity leave on children is not limited to their educational and cognitive outcomes, but also affects their overall health. For example, Li et al conducted a cross-regional and birth cohort variation using difference in difference economic modelling and found **paternity leave polices significantly improve children's health**.¹⁰⁰ They suggest three pathways: encouraging fathers' involvement in childcare, increasing medical expenditure, and forming "reasonable" family labour division.

Alongside these causal studies, a systematic review by Tugrul et al of quasi-experimental evidence on parenting-related leave policies found long-term benefits in terms of children's education, health and even labour market outcomes for families who have taken maternity and father quota parental leave.¹⁰¹ These findings echo Burgess and Goldman's review of fathers' impact on adolescents, showing how important they are as role models.¹⁰²

Moreover, a wider body of longitudinal and observational research provides additional evidence, although it should be distinguished from the causal reform studies above. While these studies cannot establish that leave itself caused the outcomes, they help explain why greater fathers' involvement following leave may matter. For instance, Yeung and Li provide the clearest evidence on children's emotional outcomes using nationally representative Singapore data and a longitudinal approach. Examining children aged three to six, they found that fathers taking two weeks or more of leave is associated with children having significantly fewer externalising problems (irritability, aggression, hyperactivity) and fewer internalising problems (withdrawal, dependency, anxiety and depressive symptoms), while a single week of leave has no significant effect.¹⁰³

97 S. Cools, J.H. Fiva and L.J. Kirkebøen, Causal Effects of Paternity Leave on Children and Parents, *The Scandinavian Journal of Economics*, 117, 3, (2015) 801-828.

98 S. Mikkelsen and N. Peter, More dads at home, more girls in maths-intensive studies? Evidence from a parental leave reform, *Economica* (2024).

99 D. Avdic, A. Karimi, A. Sjögren and E. Sundberg, *Paternity leave and child outcomes* (IFAU Working Paper, 2023).

100 X. Li, Y. Fu and A. Mao, The Power of Presence: The Impact of Paternity Leave on Child Health in China, *Health Economics* 34, 6, (2025) pp.1015-1034.

101 H. Tugrul, D. Stuckler and A. Aassve, Long-term impact of parenting-related leave policies on adolescents' well-being: a systematic review of quasi-experiments, *European Journal of Public Health*, 34(2) (2024) 272-282.

102 A. Burgess and R. Goldman, The kids are alright: Adolescents and their fathers in the UK (research review). *Contemporary Fathers in the UK series*. (2023) London: Fatherhood Institute.

103 W.-J.J. Yeung and N. Li, Paternity leave, family dynamics, and children's behavior in Singapore, *Journal of Marriage and Family*, 85, 2 (2023), 580-602.

A longitudinal follow-up using the same study confirms the dose-dependence, finding significant indirect effects on behaviour problems across two waves only where fathers took two weeks or more.¹⁰⁴ This is especially informative to the UK's reform, suggesting very short periods of leave may be insufficient to generate meaningful changes in fathers' involvement and family dynamics. The same Singapore evidence also helps identify possible mechanisms. The associations with children's behavioural outcomes operated through indirect pathways – externalising problems via reduced family conflict and parenting aggravation, internalising problems via increased marital satisfaction and reduced maternal depression – confirming that **parental leave improves children's psychological wellbeing by improving the relational environment in which they develop, rather than solely through the period of leave itself**.¹⁰⁵

The wider literature in paternal involvement and children's wellbeing has pointed to why these benefits arise. Greater paternal involvement can contribute to improved communication and stronger emotional bonds between fathers and their children.¹⁰⁶ Furthermore, fathers' involvement in early years of childcare has been linked to enhanced children's social and cognitive abilities, as fathers provide unique ways of learning in addition to activities with mothers.¹⁰⁷ Fathers' involvement is also associated with a reduction of negative emotional psychosocial outcomes among children, such as risky behaviours during adolescence.¹⁰⁸ Evidence shows that father involvement improves children's outcomes and reduces future labour-market inequalities (ie occupational segregation in this case), translating into a more engaged workforce over the long term.¹⁰⁹ Drawing on three sweeps of the UK Millennium Cohort Study (2008-2015), Vanchugova, Norman and Elliot also found that fathers' involvement in childcare at age eleven is significantly associated with reduced risky behaviour at age fourteen, with fathers' involvement and father-adolescent closeness emerging as stronger predictors than mothers'.¹¹⁰ Similar longitudinal findings come from the ALSPAC birth cohort, where fathers' emotional involvement in the first year of life predicted fewer behavioural difficulties in pre-adolescence in the UK.¹¹¹

Overall, the evidence highlights that paternity leave can offer significant economic advantages by supporting children's development. However, the mechanism is not the leave period itself, as a few weeks in infancy is too brief to shape a child directly, but rather what the leave taking sets in motion. As examined previously, fathers' sustained and independent responsibility for a newborn at the point when caregiving routines and parental identities are being formed, builds competence and confidence that persists long after the leave ends.¹¹²

104 N. Li and W.-J.J. Yeung, Paternity leave-taking and early childhood development: a longitudinal analysis in Singapore, *Journal of Marriage and Family* (2025), doi:10.1111/jomf.13100.

105 N. Li and W.-J.J. Yeung, Paternity leave-taking and early childhood development: a longitudinal analysis in Singapore, *Journal of Marriage and Family* (2025), doi:10.1111/jomf.13100.

106 R.J. Petts, C. Knoester and J. Waldfogel, Fathers' paternity leave-taking and children's perceptions of father-child relationships in the United States, *Sex Roles*, 82, 3, (2020a) 173-188.

107 T. Cano, F. Perales and J. Baxter, A matter of time: Father involvement and child cognitive outcomes, *Journal of Marriage and Family*, 81, 1, (2019) 164-184. H. Norman and J. Davies, What a difference a dad makes. Paternal Involvement and its Effects on Children's Education, (PIECE) study. (2023) Available from www.piecestudy.org/toolkit

108 D. Vanchugova, H. Norman and M.J. Elliot, Measuring the association between fathers' involvement and risky behaviours in adolescence, *Social Science Research*, 108, (2022) 102749.

109 L. Farré, C. Felfe, L. González and P. Schneider, Changing gender norms across generations: Evidence from a paternity leave reform (IZA Discussion Paper No. 16341, 2023).

110 D. Vanchugova, H. Norman and M. J. Elliot, Measuring the association between fathers' involvement and risky behaviours in adolescence, *Social Science Research*, 108 (2022), 102749.

111 C. Opondo, M. Redshaw, E. Savage-McGlynn and M. A. Quigley, Father involvement in early child-rearing and behavioural outcomes in their pre-adolescent children: evidence from the ALSPAC UK birth cohort, *BMJ Open*, 6, 11 (2016), e012034.

112 S.M. Allen and A.J. Hawkins (1999). Maternal gatekeeping: Mothers' beliefs and behaviors that inhibit greater father involvement in family work. *Journal of Marriage and the Family*, 199-212. M. Bünning (2015). What happens after the 'daddy months'? Fathers' involvement in paid work, childcare, and housework after taking parental leave in Germany. *European Sociological Review*, 31(6), 738-748.

EQUALITY IMPACTS

REDUCE GENDER GAPS AND FOSTERING EGALITARIAN ATTITUDES

Extended and well-paid leave can reduce gender inequalities in the labour market through increasing women's labour market participation and increasing their working hours, not only during the leave period and beyond as we explored in the previous section. What is more it can help enhance equality by altering the stereotypes about gender roles, and ingrain more egalitarian attitudes in parents and children, impacting gender norms of the future generations.

By shifting the norms around whose responsibility it is to do the breadwinning and caregiving, we are also able to reduce employer's discrimination against mothers at work and support more fathers not only to take up leave but also to be more involved in care.



Table 5. Summary table of causal evidence of paternity leave/parental leave for fathers on equality outcomes.

FINDING	HEADLINE FINDINGS	NO. OF STUDIES	SCOPE OF STUDIES
More egalitarian attitudes among parents	Father-reserved leave shifts beliefs about parental roles. Denmark's expansion from two to eleven reserved weeks raised support for paternity leave, reduced agreement that young children suffer when mothers work, and narrowed the perceived childcare-ability gap; more than half of the year 2 reductions in earnings and working-hours gaps were statistically explained by changed beliefs.	3	<i>Denmark (Kleven et al, 2026, working paper) and Germany (Lott & Klenner, 2016). Swedish evidence on later care for sick children provides additional behavioural support (Duvander & Johansson, 2019)</i>
More egalitarian attitudes among children	In Spain, children whose fathers were eligible for paternity leave were more likely to reject the male-breadwinner model; girls reported stronger preferences for future full-time employment. Swedish evidence also finds that the first fathers' quota increased girls' entry into mathematics-intensive upper-secondary programmes, consistent with exposure to less conventional parenting roles.	2	<i>Spain (Farré et al, 2023) and Sweden (Mikkelsen & Peter, 2024)</i>

The current UK system is unfair to both men and women, though in different ways. Women's career progression and pay are constrained by the uneven childcare responsibilities they are placed into by (institutional) default.¹¹³

Men's ability to take leave, and with it, the chance to bond with their child, take a more active role at home and achieve better work-life balance, is shaped less by choice than by income and workplace culture, both of which currently limit it.¹¹⁴ **Adequately paid, father-reserved leave can address both sides of this imbalance at once: by making dual caregiving the norm, it can help break down the institutional bias that ties caregiving to women and breadwinning to men, levelling the playing field for both.**

Evidence shows that father-specific leave promotes more equal sharing of domestic responsibilities, as elaborated extensively in the earlier part of this report. One example from Germany can be mentioned here again.

¹¹³ W. Korpi, T. Ferrarini and S. Englund (2013). Women's opportunities under different family policy constellations: gender, class, and inequality tradeoffs in western countries re-examined. *Social Politics: International Studies in Gender, State & Society*, 20(1), 1-40. <https://doi.org/https://doi.org/10.1093/sp/pxs028>

¹¹⁴ L.A. Rudman and K. Mescher (2013). Penalizing men who request a family leave: Is flexibility stigma a femininity stigma? *Journal of Social Issues*, 69(2), 322-340.

Following the introduction of two reserved “daddy months” in 2007, fathers who took leave, reduced their paid working hours and increased their involvement in childcare and family time – effects that persisted for several years after they returned to work, rather than being confined to the leave period itself. However, the depth of change depended on leave length: short leave increased fathers' childcare involvement, but **a lasting shift in the division of housework specifically only emerged among fathers who took longer leave (more than two months)** or leave taken alone while their partner worked.¹¹⁵

Additionally, father-specific leave shapes the next generation's gender role attitudes.¹¹⁶ Research consistently finds that the more time fathers spend on housework and childcare, the more gender-egalitarian their children become, not because of what parents say, but because of what they see parents do.¹¹⁷ This effect is visible as early as age two¹¹⁸ and holds into adolescence, shaping the behavioural outcomes into adulthood.¹¹⁹

With regard to studies that explore the impact of parental leave reforms, Farré et al, in their combined lab-in-the-field and natural experiments, found that Spanish children whose fathers had access to paternity leave develop more gender-egalitarian attitudes and are substantially more likely to reject traditional male-breadwinner roles.¹²⁰ Specifically, this means that girls showed higher preferences for full-time working in the future.¹²¹ This aligns with evidence showing that children of fathers who do more housework grow up to be more gender-egalitarian themselves.¹²²

¹¹⁵ M. Tamm (2019). Fathers' parental leave-taking, childcare involvement and labor market participation. *Labour Economics*, 59, 184-197.

¹¹⁶ See for a review, Chung, 2021.

¹¹⁷ T. Cano and H. Hofmeister, The intergenerational transmission of gender: Paternal influences on children's gender attitudes, *Journal of Marriage and Family*, 85, 1, (2023) 193-214.

¹¹⁸ E. Herbaut (2025). Paternal involvement and children's internalization of gender roles in early childhood. *Journal of Marriage and Family*. <https://doi.org/10.1111/jomf.13045>

¹¹⁹ Cano and Hofmeister, The intergenerational transmission of gender.

¹²⁰ Farré, L., Felfe, C., González, L., & Schneider, P. (2026). Changing gender norms across generations: Evidence from a paternity leave reform (No. 12863). Farré, Lidia/Felfe, Christina/González, Libertad/Schneider, Patrick.

¹²¹ Cano and Hofmeister, The intergenerational transmission of gender. M. Evertsson, Gender ideology and the sharing of housework and child care in Sweden, *Journal of Family Issues*, 35, 7, (2014) 927-949.

¹²² Cano and Hofmeister, The intergenerational transmission of gender. M. Evertsson, Gender ideology and the sharing of housework and child care in Sweden, *Journal of Family Issues*, 35, 7, (2014) 927-949.

Other studies have shown that sons of involved fathers are more likely to share care themselves; daughters of employed mothers earn more and hold more senior roles as adults.¹²³

Beyond the household level, paternity leave uptake helps normalise men's involvement in early caregiving and reduces gendered expectations in the workplace – namely, removing biases against mothers. Studies show strong “peer effects”: when male colleagues take parental leave, others are more likely to follow.¹²⁴ These cultural shifts help reduce discriminatory assumptions that only women will take extended leave, thereby lowering the risk of mothers being penalised in recruitment, promotion or pay decisions.¹²⁵

Such policies can also help remove biases against all workers taking up family-friendly arrangements,¹²⁶ developing a more inclusive workplace environment for all workers.¹²⁷

Kleven et al significantly advance the literature by directly exploring the effect of paternity leave on **beliefs and norms**, not just labour market outcomes.¹²⁸ This study addresses a natural objection to leave reform: that policy can change behaviour without changing underlying attitudes. Using a purpose-built survey of nearly 40,000 parents linked to administrative records, fielded both before and after Denmark's 2022 reform (which expanded earmarked, well-paid paternity leave from two to eleven weeks), they found that parents who experienced the reform became more progressive in their gender role attitudes, with agreement with statements like “pre-school children suffer if their mothers work full time” falling significantly. These effects were concentrated among first-time parents, who are less anchored in pre-existing arrangements, suggesting that steady-state effects will exceed the short-run estimates as all families come to experience the new regime from their first child.

This study is important because it provides direct causal evidence that policy reform does not simply follow existing attitudes but actively reshapes them, meaning the equality gains from reform are likely to compound over time, rather than plateau.

123 M. Cunningham, The influence of parental attitudes and behaviors on children's attitudes toward gender and household labor in early adulthood. *Journal of Marriage and Family*, 63, 1, (2001) 111-122. M. Evertsson, The reproduction of gender: housework and attitudes towards gender equality in the home among Swedish boys and girls, *The British Journal of Sociology*, 57, 3, (2006) 415-436.

R. Fernández, A. Fogli and C. Olivetti, Mothers and Sons: Preference Formation and Female Labor Force Dynamics, *The Quarterly Journal of Economics*, 119, 4, (2004) 1249-1299. K.L. McGinn, M.R. Castro and E.L. Lingo, Learning From Mum: Cross-National Evidence Linking Maternal Employment and Adult Children's Outcomes, *Work, Employment and Society* 33, 3, (2019) 374-400.

124 M. Carlsson and A.A. Reshid, Co-worker peer effects on parental leave take-up, *The Scandinavian Journal of Economics*, 124, 4, (2022) 930-957.

125 Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development. *LMFL2 maternal employment rates*, (OECD Family Database, 2023). M. Ronsén and R. H. Kitterød, Gender-Equalizing Family Policies and Mothers' Entry into Paid Work: Recent Evidence From Norway, *Feminist Economics*, 21, 1, (2015), 59-89.

126 H.Chung and H. Seo, Flexibility stigma across Europe: How national contexts can shift the extent to which flexible workers are stigmatised, *Social Indicators Research*, 174, 3, (2024) 945-965. A. Kasperska, A. Matysiak and E. Cukrowska-Torzewska, Managerial (dis)preferences towards employees working from home: Post-pandemic experimental evidence, *PloS one*, 19, 5, (2024).

127 A. Kasperska, A. Matysiak and E. Cukrowska-Torzewska, (2025). Career Penalties for Flexible Working: How Organizational Culture Shapes Managerial Decisions (WNE working paper No. 2025-17). Y. Lott and C. Klenner, Ideal workers and ideal parents: Working-time norms and the acceptance of part-time and parental leave at the workplace in Germany (No. 204) (2016) (WSI working paper). Y. Lott, S. Wang and H. Chung, *Karriereknick durch Homeoffice? Empirische Evidenz eines Experiments* (No. 87) (2025) WSI Policy Brief. H. Chung, *Flexible working arrangements and gender equality in Europe*. Publications Office of the European Union. (2024).

128 Kleven et al., Expanding Paternity Leave (working paper).

Taken together, this evidence points to a single mechanism operating at multiple levels: father-specific leave does not just redistribute caregiving hours within a household, it reshapes the norms that determine who is expected to provide care and who is expected to earn - for the couples who take it, for their children as they grow up, and for the colleagues who watch them do it.

This matters for how the UK should think about reform. Because these effects compound across household, generational and workplace levels, and because – as Kleven et al show – policy can shift underlying attitudes rather than simply reflect them, the equality gains from adequately paid, father-reserved leave are expected to grow over time.



LIMITATIONS OF STUDIES AND GAPS

HOW STRONG IS THIS EVIDENCE?

Here we summarise the content of this report based on the strength of the argument, on how consistent the empirical evidence was across different studies, but also based on the strength of the methodological approaches used in the papers. Here we distinguish between scenarios we believe have strong evidence base that it almost certainly will happen with policy reforms in the UK, and those that are probably likely but with a bit less certainty in their strength and direction, and finally those that have weaker conclusion and can potentially happen in a more optimistic scenario.

Furthermore, where studies report sufficiently comparable outcomes, we use their reported effect sizes to calculate an indicative average or range. These figures are intended to show the approximate magnitude of effects observed across the existing evidence base and provide an evidence-based benchmark for the UK. However, they should not be interpreted as precise forecasts of the effect of a six-week paid leave at 90% UK reform.

ONSERVATIVE SCENARIO: HIGH CONFIDENCE

1. Fathers’ increased involvement in childcare and housework

Every causal study of a well-paid, reserved quota points the same way – more fathers use their entitlement and share more of the load at home. In Canada, Quebec’s 2006 reform (a five-week non-transferable “daddy quota” at 70% pay) raised paternity leave claim rates by 53 percentage points, from 21.3% to approximately 74.3%, and their leave duration by three weeks.¹²⁹ Quebec time-use data also shows the gain concentrated in fathers’ solo-care responsibility (time caring alone), which persisted after the leave ended.¹³⁰

¹²⁹ A. Patnaik (2019). Reserving time for daddy: The consequences of fathers’ quotas. *Journal of Labor Economics*, 37(4), 1009-1059. <https://doi.org/10.1086/703115>
¹³⁰ D. Wray (2020). Paternity leave and fathers’ responsibility: Evidence from a natural experiment in Canada. *Journal of Marriage and Family*, 82(2), 534-549. <https://doi.org/10.1111/jomf.12661>

In Germany, the 2007 Elterngeld reform (two reserved “daddy months” within a 14-month scheme at 67% of net earnings) led fathers who took leave to spend about 1.2 hours more on family activities and 0.5 hours more on housework per weekday, and 1.4-1.6 hours more on weekend childcare. Critically, the increases in weekday housework and Sunday childcare were still statistically significant several years after fathers returned to work, producing lasting shifts in behaviour at home rather than time off during leave.¹³¹ Other German survey evidence around the same 2007 reform confirms higher father involvement among leave-takers,¹³² and in Denmark the 2022 reform (expanding earmarked leave from two to eleven weeks) narrowed the perceived gap in mothers’ and fathers’ childcare ability.¹³³

Table 6. Examples of studies with strong causal evidence of paternity leave/parental leave for fathers on father's involvement in childcare and housework

STUDY	REFORM EXAMINED	EFFECT AS REPORTED	COMMON METRIC
Tamm, 2019	Germany 2007: 2 daddy months, 67%	Fathers spent 1.2 more hours per weekday with family, including 0.5 more time in housework ; Weekend childcare rose by 1.4-1.6 more hours per day	+~0.5 h/wkday housework; +1.4~1.6 h weekend childcare
Bünning, 2015	Germany 2007: 2 daddy months, 67%	Fathers spent about 1 more hour per weekday on childcare and about 4 fewer hours per week in paid work	+~1 h/wkday childcare; –4 h/wk paid work
Patnaik, 2019	Quebec 2006: 5-wk quota, ~70%	Paternity leave take-up rose by 53 percentage points and leave length by about 3 weeks. 1–3 years later, fathers did 15 more minutes of housework per day and spent 37 more minutes per day on non-market activities	housework +~0.25 h/wkday; take-up +53pp

Note: Because there is already a relatively large body of evidence on fathers’ involvement, we focused mainly on the more recent studies from Germany and Quebec/Canada, where the leave reforms are relatively similar to what we are proposing for the UK and where the studies provide clear estimates of changes in fathers’ actual childcare and housework. We therefore use five causal studies here rather than including every study reported earlier, as some examine different outcomes that are less directly comparable. For example, Duvander & Johansson (2019) looks at Swedish fathers’ later sharing of leave to care for sick children as a proxy for care equality, rather than actual hours spent on routine childcare or housework. This makes it less useful for estimating the likely size of changes in fathers’ everyday care in the UK.

¹³¹ M. Tamm (2019). Fathers’ parental leave-taking, childcare involvement and labour market participation. *Labour Economics*, 59, 184-197. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.labeco.2019.04.007>
¹³² M. Bünning (2015). What happens after the ‘daddy months’? *European Sociological Review*, 31(6), 738-748. <https://doi.org/10.1093/esr/jcv072>
¹³³ J. Kluge and M. Tamm (2013). Parental leave regulations, mothers’ labor force attachment and fathers’ childcare involvement. *Journal of Population Economics*, 26(3), 983-1005. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s00148-012-0404-1>
¹³³ H. Kleven, C. Landais, A.S. Lassen, P. Rosenbaum, H. Steingrimsdóttir and J.E. Søgaard (2026). Expanding paternity leave: Effects on beliefs, norms, and gender gaps (NBER Working Paper No. 34862). <https://www.nber.org/papers/w34862>

What this means for the UK

Across the comparable studies reviewed, the UK six-week leave paid at 90% scheme would be very likely to increase fathers' housework by around 15-30 minutes per day and childcare by around one hour on weekdays, with potentially larger increases of around 1.4-1.6 hours on weekend days. Fathers' take-up would also be expected to rise substantially.

2. Supporting mothers' employment and return to work

A generous, reserved entitlement for fathers has been widely found to support mothers to return to work when they choose, on better terms, and to reduce the long-term employment, earnings and progression penalties of motherhood. In Canada, Quebec's five-week quota raised mothers' labour-force participation and full-time work by about 5 percentage points and cut part-time work and unemployment, with the effect largest two to three years after the reform.¹³⁴ The same Quebec reform raised mothers' full-time employment by 5.4 percentage points and their time physically at the workplace by 44%.¹³⁵

Using a quasi-experimental approach applied to European Labour Force Survey data for the years 1998-2016, Bacheron found that following the introduction of paternity leave in the UK, mothers' employment rates increase by roughly 3-10 percentage points¹³⁶.

In Spain, the 2007 two-week, 100%-paid, father-reserved leave raised the probability of mothers being in work shortly after birth by about 2.6 to 4 percentage points.¹³⁷ In Germany, the 2007 reform produced gains in maternal employment in the medium term (years three to five after birth) that persisted into higher long-run earnings for higher-earning mothers.¹³⁸ The one exception is Norway's 1993 four-week quota, where mothers' earnings fell as some cut their labour-force attachment.¹³⁹ But because that 1993 reform also increased general parental leave by three weeks – mothers themselves increased its uptake – this fall in mothers' earnings may reflect mothers' own additional leave rather than the father's quota itself, a contributing factor the paper cannot fully rule out.¹⁴⁰

134 Dunatchik, A. and Özcan, B. (2021). Reducing mommy penalties with daddy quotas. *Journal of European Social Policy*, 31(2), 175-191. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0958928720963324>.
135 Patnaik, A. (2019). Reserving time for daddy: The consequences of fathers' quotas. *Journal of Labor Economics*, 37(4), 1009-1059. <https://doi.org/10.1086/703115>.
136 Bacheron. (2021) The impact of paternity leave on mothers' employment in Europe. Working paper.
137 Farré, L. and González, L. (2019). Does paternity leave reduce fertility? *Journal of Public Economics*, 172, 52-66. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jpubeco.2018.12.002>.
138 J. Kluge and S. Schmitz (2018). Back to work: Parental benefits and mothers' labor market outcomes in the medium run. *ILR Review*, 71(1), 143-173. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0019793917710933>
139 S. Cools, J.H. Fiva and L.J. Kirkebøen (2015). Causal effects of paternity leave on children and parents. *Scandinavian Journal of Economics*, 117(3), 801-828. <https://doi.org/10.1111/sjoe.12113>
140 S. Cools, J.H. Fiva and L.J. Kirkebøen (2015). Causal effects of paternity leave on children and parents. *Scandinavian Journal of Economics*, 117(3), 801-828. <https://doi.org/10.1111/sjoe.12113>

Table 7. Examples of studies with strong causal evidence of paternity leave/ parental leave for fathers on mothers employment outcomes

STUDY	REFORM EXAMINED	EFFECT AS REPORTED	COMMON METRIC
Dunatchik & Özcan, 2021	Quebec 2006: 5-wk quota, ~70% pay	1. Mothers' employment participation and full-time employment increased by about 5 percentage points	+5pp participation/full-time
Patnaik, 2019	Quebec 2006: 5-wk quota, ~70% pay	1. Mothers' full-time employment increased by 5.4 percentage points. 2. Time spent at the workplace increased by 44% (approximately 80 additional minutes at the workplace per day).	+5.4pp full-time
Farré & González, 2019	Spain 2007: 2-wk reserved, 100% pay	1. Mothers' employment rate increased by 2.6-4 percentage points six months after childbirth	+2.6 to 4pp
Bacheron, 2021	European countries	1. Mothers' employment rate increased by 3-10 percentage points	+3 to 10pp
Kluge & Schmitz, 2018	Germany 2007 reform: 2 month daddy' quote 67% pay	1. 3-5 years after childbirth , mothers' employment increased by 2.5-3.6 percentage points 2. 3–5 years after childbirth, full-time employment among higher-income mothers increased by about 3.5 percentage points	+2.5 to 3.6pp employment rate; +3.5pp full-time for high-income mothers

What this means for the UK

For these well-paid and long paternity leave reforms in Canada, Spain and Germany, mothers' employment rate, including full-time employment, substantially increased.

Thus, six weeks of well-paid, non-transferable paternity leave could plausibly increase UK mothers' employment by around 3-10 percentage points, with a similar increase possibly observed in mothers' full-time employment rate as well.

3. Within-household gender pay and income gap

In Denmark, the 1998 reform (which raised earmarked paternity leave from two to four weeks at close to 100% pay) increased women's relative income share by about 1.2 percentage points, an effect that lasted up to eight years.¹⁴¹ Denmark's 2022 reform (expanding earmarked leave to eleven weeks) further narrowed the post-leave gender earnings gap by 2.8 percentage points in year two, around 14% of the child earnings penalty.¹⁴² And in Germany the motherhood wage penalty effectively disappeared after the 2007 reform, in every year up to five years after birth,¹⁴³ and for mothers with higher pre-birth earning, the reform increased their earning by up to 10%.¹⁴⁴ Studies further highlighted the importance of well-paid paternity leave. When comparing five Danish reforms, adequately compensating fathers was found to be the most effective on addressing within-household gender wage gap, rather than entitlement alone.¹⁴⁵ However, the only outlier is again Norway's 1993 reform, where mothers' increased leave uptake may have temporarily reduced their labour-market participation.¹⁴⁶

Table 8. Examples of studies with strong causal evidence of paternity leave/parental leave for fathers on household gender pay and income gap

STUDY	REFORM EXAMINED	EFFECT AS REPORTED	COMMON METRIC
Drue Dahl et al, 2019	Denmark 1998: 2 → 4 wks, ~100% pay	1. Mothers' share of household income increased by 1.2 percentage points , with effects lasting up to 8 years	+1.2pp income share
Kleven et al, 2026	Denmark 2022: 2 → 11 wks, ~100% pay	1. The gender earnings gap fell by 34 percentage points in the first year and by 2.8 percentage points in the second year . 2. The working-hours gap fell by 1.4 percentage points within 2 years	-2.8pp earnings gap
Frodermann et al, 2023	Germany 2007 reform: 2-month "daddy's quota" 67% pay	1. Mothers' earnings increased by 2.6-10% up to 9 years after childbirth , with larger effects among higher earners	+ 2.6% to 10% in earnings (mainly higher earners)
Mari & Cutuli, 2021	Germany 2007 reform: 2-month "daddy's quota" 67% pay	1. The estimated motherhood wage penalty was reduced to around zero following the reform	penalty → ~0

141 J. Drue Dahl, M. Ejrnæs and T.H. Jørgensen (2019). Earmarked paternity leave and the relative income within couples. *Economics Letters*, 180, 85-88. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.econlet.2019.04.018>

142 H. Kleven, C. Landais, A.S. Lassen, P. Rosenbaum, H. Steingrimsdóttir and J.E. Søgaard (2026). Expanding paternity leave: Effects on beliefs, norms, and gender gaps (NBER Working Paper No. 34862). <https://www.nber.org/papers/w34862>

143 G. Mari and G. Cutuli (2021). Do parental leaves make the motherhood wage penalty worse? *European Sociological Review*, 37(3), 365-378. <https://doi.org/10.1093/esr/jcaa048>

144 C. Frodermann, K. Wrohlich and A Zucco (2023). Parental leave policy and long-run earnings of mothers. *Labour Economics*, 80, 102296. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.labeco.2022.102296>

145 S.H. Andersen (2018). Paternity leave and the motherhood penalty: New causal evidence. *Journal of Marriage and Family*, 80(5), 1125-1143. <https://doi.org/10.1111/jomf.12507>

146 S. Cools, J.H. Fiva and L.J. Kirkeboen (2015). Causal effects of paternity leave on children and parents. *Scandinavian Journal of Economics*, 117(3), 801-828. <https://doi.org/10.1111/sjoe.12113>

What this means for the UK

Where leave is well paid and adequate, mothers' wages increased by 1.77-2.05pp within three years and gender wage gap reduced by 1.2-2.8pp in both the short and long run.

Thus, a UK six-week at 90% pay scheme would be very likely to narrow the within-household gap by roughly 1-3pp, and increase mothers' wages by roughly 2pp.



MODERATE SCENARIO: PROBABLE

1. Relationship stability and divorce

Paternity leave can support relationship stability, but the effect is more conditional compared to other outcomes mentioned in earlier tier. In Iceland, the 2001 reform (one non-transferable month at 80% pay) cut parental separation by 11.6 percentage points at five years and 8.9 percentage points at fifteen.¹⁴⁷ In the United States – where there is no national reform, so this compares fathers who did and did not take leave using longitudinal cohort data – dissolution fell from 7.5% to 5.6%.¹⁴⁸ Across 27 European countries, at least two weeks of paid leave reduced divorce rates by about 0.36 percentage points per 1,000 people over fifteen years, with longer leave producing greater effects.¹⁴⁹ But the conditions matter. Sweden's first and second reserved “daddy months” (introduced in 1995 and 2002) raised separation by about 1 percentage point (around 10% in relative terms) among traditional male-breadwinner couples, where fathers' active caregiving is less expected and supported.¹⁵⁰ Norway's later extension of the quota from six to ten weeks found no effect on union stability as well.¹⁵¹

Table 9. Examples of studies with strong to moderately strong causal evidence of paternity leave/parental leave for fathers on relationship stability and relationship dissolution

STUDY	REFORM EXAMINED	EFFECT AS REPORTED	COMMON METRIC
Ólafsson & Steingrimsdóttir, 2020	Iceland 2001: 1-month reserved, 80% pay	1. The probability of parental separation fell by 11.6 percentage points after 5 years and 8.9 percentage points after 15 years	-11.6pp in divorce rate at 5 yrs; -8.9pp at 15 yrs
Petts et al, 2020	US: father took leave	1. Paternity leave uptake reduced relationship-dissolution probability by 1.9 percentage points (fell from 7.5% to 5.6%)	-1.9pp
Morales, 2025	27 European countries: ≥2 wks	1. Divorce rates fell by about 0.36 divorces per 1,000 people 15 years after reform	-0.36pp per 1000 people divorces at 15 yrs
Avdic & Karimi, 2018 (counter)	Sweden 1995 & 2002: 75-90% pay	1. Separation probability increased by about 1.4 pp after the 1995 reform and ~1 pp after the 2002 reform , but this is concentrated particularly among more traditional couples	+0.9-1.4pp
Hart et al, 2022 (counter)	Norway: 6 → 10 wks, ~100% pay	1. No statistically significant effect on union stability within 5 years	0%

147 A. Ólafsson and H. Steingrimsdóttir (2020). How does daddy at home affect marital stability? *The Economic Journal*, 130(629), 1471-1500. <https://doi.org/10.1093/ej/ueaa009>

148 R.J. Petts, D.L. Carlson and C. Knoester (2020). If I [take] leave, will you stay? Paternity leave and relationship stability. *Journal of Social Policy*, 49(4), 829-849. <https://doi.org/10.1017/S0047279419000928>.

149 M. Morales (2025). The impact of paid paternity leave reforms on divorce rates in Europe (GLO Discussion Paper No. 1659). <https://hdl.handle.net/10419/324754>

150 D. Avdic and A.Karimi (2018). Modern family? Paternity leave and marital stability. *American Economic Journal: Applied Economics*, 10(4), 283-307. <https://doi.org/10.1257/app.20160426>

151 R.K. Hart, S.N. Andersen and N. Drange (2022). Effects of extended paternity leave on family dynamics. *Journal of Marriage and Family*, 84(3), 814-839. <https://doi.org/10.1111/jomf.12818>

What this means for the UK

Because reserved, well-paid leave of at least two weeks reduced break-up, a UK six-week/90% scheme is likely to see a similar shift in break-up among couples who take it in the long term (range 8.9pp to 11.6pp after discounting for take-up in five to fifteen years). However, there may be a small risk of the reverse among the most traditional couples.

2. Maternal physical health improves

Where paternity leave is well paid, long and flexible, maternal health improves. In Sweden, the 2012 “double days” reform (up to 30 days of paid leave taken simultaneously with the mother, at 78% pay) cut mothers' childbirth-related medical visits by 1pp and antibiotic prescriptions by 1.5pp in the first months after birth.¹⁵² In Norway, the four-week “daddy's quota” cut mothers' sickness absence by 1.3pp in the years around the birth – but this is mainly in families where fathers took leave beyond the quota, not from the quota alone.¹⁵³

Table 10. Examples of studies with strong evidence of paternity leave/parental leave for fathers on maternal health outcomes

STUDY	REFORM EXAMINED	EFFECT AS REPORTED	COMMON METRIC
Persson & Rossin-Slater, 2024	Sweden 2012: “double days” reform, ~78%	1. In the first month after birth , mothers were 1pp less likely to have a hospital visit for childbirth-related complications and 1.5pp less likely to receive an antibiotic prescription	-1 to 1.5 pp
Bratberg & Naz, 2014	Norway: 4-wk quota	1. Where fathers took leave beyond the 4-week quota , mothers were 1.3pp less likely to have sickness absence lasting more than 16 days , from a baseline of about 23%	-1.3pp (where fathers took leave beyond the quota)

What this means for the UK.

Because maternal health improved mainly where leave was long or flexible, a UK six-week entitlement may deliver a 1-1.5pp fall in maternal sickness absence, as well as mothers' health service use.

152 P. Persson and M. Rossin-Slater (2024). When dad can stay home: Fathers' workplace flexibility and maternal health. *American Economic Journal: Applied Economics*, 16(4), 186-219.

153 E. Bratberg and G. Naz (2014). Does paternity leave affect mothers' sickness absence? *European Sociological Review*, 30(4), 500-511. <https://doi.org/10.1093/esr/jcu058>

3. Fathers’ wellbeing and mental health improves

Earmarked quotas across six European countries (Norway, Sweden, Denmark, Iceland, Finland and Germany) raised parents' life satisfaction by about 0.18 points on a 10-point life-satisfaction scale; an effect still visible years after the reforms,¹⁵⁴ and in France, fathers who took their two-week leave exhibited a post-partum depression rate 1.2 percentage points lower than those who did not take leave, measured two months after the birth.¹⁵⁵ (The mothers' side of this evidence is mixed and is treated under the optimistic tier below.)

Table 11. Examples of studies with strong evidence of paternity leave/parental leave for fathers on paternal wellbeing and health outcomes

STUDY	REFORM EXAMINED	EFFECT AS REPORTED	COMMON METRIC
Korsgren & van Lent, 2022	6 European countries: earmarked quotas	1. Parental life satisfaction increased by 0.18 points on a 10-point scale 2. Effects were greater for mothers than fathers	+0.18 / 10 (scale points)
Barry et al, 2023	France: 2-wk leave, 80-100% pay	1. Fathers who took leave had 4.5% post-partum depression prevalence vs 5.7% among fathers who did not	-1.2pp

What this means for the UK

Because fathers' own wellbeing rose consistently even for the less generous paternity leave policy (two-week/fully paid leave in France), a UK six-week and 90% scheme may produce a similar or even higher gain in fathers' wellbeing.

For example, fathers’ life satisfaction may rise up 0.18 points and their post-partum depression may even decrease by 1.2pp or more.

154 Korsgren, P., & van Lent, M. (2022). Earmarked paternity leave and well-being (IZA Discussion Paper No. 15022). <https://docs.iza.org/dp15022.pdf>
155 Barry, K.M., Gomajee, R., Benarous, X., Dufourg, M.-N., Courtin, E., & Melchior, M. (2023). Paternity leave uptake and parental post-partum depression: Findings from the ELFE cohort study. *The Lancet Public Health*, 8(1), e15-e27. [https://doi.org/10.1016/S2468-2667\(22\)00288-2](https://doi.org/10.1016/S2468-2667(22)00288-2)

4. Egalitarian gender-role attitudes

In Denmark, the 2022 reform raised support for paternity leave, reduced agreement that children suffer when mothers work, and narrowed the perceived childcare-ability gap, with 34-44% of the second-year narrowing of the earnings gaps statistically mediated by belief change.¹⁵⁶ In Sweden, evidence on the later sharing of care for sick children – followed for twelve years after the 1995 reform and ten years after the 2002 reform – provides behavioural supports.¹⁵⁷ Emerging evidence also suggests children exposed to paternity leave hold less traditional gender attitudes. In Spain, children were more likely to reject the male-breadwinner model, and in Sweden, girls were more likely to enter maths-intensive upper-secondary tracks.¹⁵⁸ Currently, however, this evidence is relatively thin, which is why it sits at the moderate rather than the conservative tier.

Table 12. Examples of studies with strong evidence of paternity leave/parental leave for fathers on gender role attitude outcomes

STUDY	REFORM EXAMINED	EFFECT AS REPORTED	COMMON METRIC
Kleven et al, 2026	Denmark 2022: 2 ➔ 11 wks, ~100% pay	1. Parents' gender-role beliefs became more progressive: 2.3 points for mothers and 2 points for fathers on a 0-100 scale. 2. Changes in beliefs explain around 34–44% of the year 2 reduction in the gender earnings gap	34-44% of year 2 earning gaps mediated; +2 to 2.3 points towards more progressive directions
Farré et al, 2023	Spain: paternity-leave eligibility	1. At around age 12, eligible children had 0.26 SD more egalitarian gender-role attitudes. Support for mothers with young children working rose 14.6pp , and perceived social acceptability of maternal employment rose 17.9pp	+0.26 SD in the overall gender-role-attitudes index; +14.6 to +17.9 percentage points in attitudes and perceived norms concerning mothers' employment (+0.31 to +0.37 SD).
Mikkelsen & Peter, 2024	Sweden: reserved-leave reform	1. Among girls whose fathers had previously taken very little leave, the probability of graduating from the most maths-intensive upper-secondary programme increased by about 4pp. 2. No significant effect was found for girls overall or for boys	+4pp among girls with low-leave-profile fathers

Note: The gender-beliefs index is originally measured on a 0–1 scale in the paper, where lower values indicate more gender-progressive beliefs and higher values indicate more gender-conservative beliefs. For better interpretation, the effects reported here are rescaled to an equivalent 0–100 scale. For example, an effect of –0.023 is presented as a 2.3-point shift in a more gender-progressive direction.

156 Kleven, H., Landais, C., Lassen, A. S., Rosenbaum, P., Steingrimsdóttir, H., & Sogaard, J. E. (2026). Expanding paternity leave: Effects on beliefs, norms, and gender gaps (NBER Working Paper No. 34862). <https://www.nber.org/papers/w34862>
157 Duvander, A.-Z., & Johansson, M. (2019). Does fathers' care spill over? *Feminist Economics*, 25(2), 67-89. <https://doi.org/10.1080/13545701.2018.1474240>
158 Farré, L., Felfe, C., González, L., & Schneider, P. (2023). *Changing gender norms across generations: Evidence from a paternity leave reform* (IZA Discussion Paper No. 16341). Mikkelsen, S., & Peter, N. (2024). More dads at home, more girls in maths-intensive studies? Evidence from a parental leave reform. *Economica* <https://doi.org/10.1111/ecca.12547>

What this means for the UK

The UK's six weeks of well-paid, non-transferable leave for fathers may contribute to a small but meaningful immediate change in parents' gender-role beliefs, potentially two points towards the progressive attitudes on a 0-100 attitude scale. Children's attitudes may also be more egalitarian, with 14.6-17.9pp increase in the share of those supporting in mothers' employment. However, more evidence will be needed to increase certainty of this association.

5. Child development

There is a growing body of evidence that paternity leave can support children's development, although the size and direction of effects vary across developmental outcomes and socio-economic groups. Norway's 1993 four-week quota raised exam scores at age sixteen by about 0.04 standard deviations (0.07 where the father was equally or more educated than the mother),¹⁵⁹ but Sweden's 1995 one-month quota cut the GPA of sons of non-college-educated fathers by 0.07 standard deviations.¹⁶⁰ This variation, especially negative effects for lower-class groups, means that we have moderate, rather than high, confidence in the overall effect.

Table 13. Examples of studies with evidence of paternity leave/parental leave for fathers on children's cognitive outcomes

STUDY	REFORM EXAMINED	EFFECT AS REPORTED	COMMON METRIC
Cools et al, 2015	Norway 1993: 4-wk quota	1. Children's exam scores at age 16 increased by about 0.04 SD overall ; 2. The increase was about 0.07 SD when fathers had higher education than mothers	+0.04 to +0.07 SD
Avdic et al, 2023 (counter)	Sweden 1995: 1-month quota	1. Sons of non-college-educated fathers experienced a 0.07 SD decline in compulsory school-leaving GPA . 2. No significant average effects were found for girls or children of college-educated fathers	-0.07 SD (lower-SES sons)

159 S. Cools, J.H. Fiva and L.J. Kirkebøen (2015). Causal effects of paternity leave on children and parents. *Scandinavian Journal of Economics*, 117(3), 801-828. <https://doi.org/10.1111/sjoe.12113>
160 D Avdic, A. Karimi, A. Sjögren and E. Sundberg (2023). Paternity leave and child outcomes (IFAU Working Paper 2023:25). <https://www.ifau.se/en/Research/Publications/Working-papers/2023/paternity-leave-and-child-outcomes/>

What this means for the UK

The evidence suggests that a six-week, well-paid entitlement in the UK is likely to produce modest positive benefits for children with regard to a number of developmental outcomes, particularly where leave leads to greater and more sustained paternal involvement.

However, the size of these effects is likely to vary across families and the developmental outcome we focus on.

OPTIMISTIC SCENARIO: EVIDENCE MIXED

1. Maternal mental health/post-partum depression

The evidence is mixed and relatively thin. In the same French study where fathers benefited, mothers whose partners took the two-week leave had slightly higher odds of post-partum depression.¹⁶¹ Similarly, a UK study found no maternal mental-health benefit under two weeks of low-paid leave.¹⁶² Hence, existing studies of relatively short leave do not establish a clear maternal mental-health benefit.

Table 14. Examples of studies with evidence of paternity leave/parental leave for fathers on maternal health outcomes

STUDY	REFORM EXAMINED	EFFECT AS REPORTED	COMMON METRIC
Barry et al, 2023	France: 2-wk leave, 80-100%	1. Maternal PPD prevalence was 16.1% when fathers took leave vs 15.3% when they did not	+0.8pp
Humphreys et al, 2025	UK: 2-wk statutory, ~20% pay	1. No maternal benefit	~0 (maternal)

What this means for the UK

Because these findings come only from short, low-paid leave, they do not tell us what a generous six-week paid at 90% design would do. So for the UK, a maternal benefit is possible but uncertain.

161 K.M. Barry, R. Gomajee, X. Benarous, M.-N. Dufourg, E. Courtin and M. Melchior (2023). Paternity leave uptake and parental post-partum depression: Findings from the ELFE cohort study. *The Lancet Public Health*, 8(1), e15-e27. [https://doi.org/10.1016/S2468-2667\(22\)00288-2](https://doi.org/10.1016/S2468-2667(22)00288-2)
162 E. Humphreys, S. O'Neill, V. Filippi and E. Courtin (2025). Paternity leave, mental health and wellbeing for new parents. *SSM-Population Health*, 30, 101811. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.ssmph.2025.101811>

2. Fertility

There is growing evidence that paternity leave can support fertility, but effects are highly heterogeneous across groups. Positive effects are concentrated among particular birth orders and socio-economic groups, and appear to depend on policy design, including the duration and generosity of leave, while other reforms produce no effect or even delay subsequent births. For example, Spain's 2017 extension to a four-week father-exclusive entitlement (at 100% pay) raised third and higher-order births slightly (by about 0.0031 and 0.001 monthly births per 1,000 women respectively),¹⁶³ and low-income Swedish couples showed a temporary rise in third births under the 1995 one-month quota.¹⁶⁴ But several studies found no effect, including Norway's 1993 four-week quota and its later extension,¹⁶⁵ and Spain's earlier 2007 two-week quota actually delayed and reduced subsequent fertility.¹⁶⁶ Thus, fertility is a plausible wider benefit of a better-paid and longer paternity leave reform, but one for which the direction and magnitude of the aggregate UK effect remain uncertain.

Table 15. Examples of studies with evidence of paternity leave/parental leave for fathers on fertility rates

STUDY	REFORM EXAMINED	EFFECT AS REPORTED	COMMON METRIC
Regueiro-Ons et al, 2024	Spain 2017: 4-wk extension, 100%	1. Third births increased by 0.8% (+0.0031 monthly births per 1,000 women). 2. Fourth births increased by 1.1% (+~0.001 per 1,000). 3. No effect on first or second births	+0.001 to 0.0031 monthly births per 1,000 women (higher-order)
Duvander et al, 2020	Norway 1993/Sweden 1995, ~80%	1. No overall fertility effect in either country. 2. In Sweden, couples with low-income fathers had a higher third-birth risk after the reform (OR 1.28)	0 to temporary +28% for third birth
Cools et al, 2015; Hart et a., 2022 (counter)	Norway 1993 quota & 6 → 10-wk ext	1. No effect	0%
Farré & González, 2019 (counter)	Spain 2007: 2-wk quota, 100%	1. Eligible couples delayed subsequent births and were less likely to have another child within 6 years , particularly older couples	-0.97pp in yr 2 to -1.79pp in yr 6 for second birth

163 C. Regueiro-Ons, J. Pinilla and B. González López-Valcárcel (2024). More father leave, more babies? [Preprint] *Research Square*. <https://doi.org/10.21203/rs.3.rs-4213059/v1>

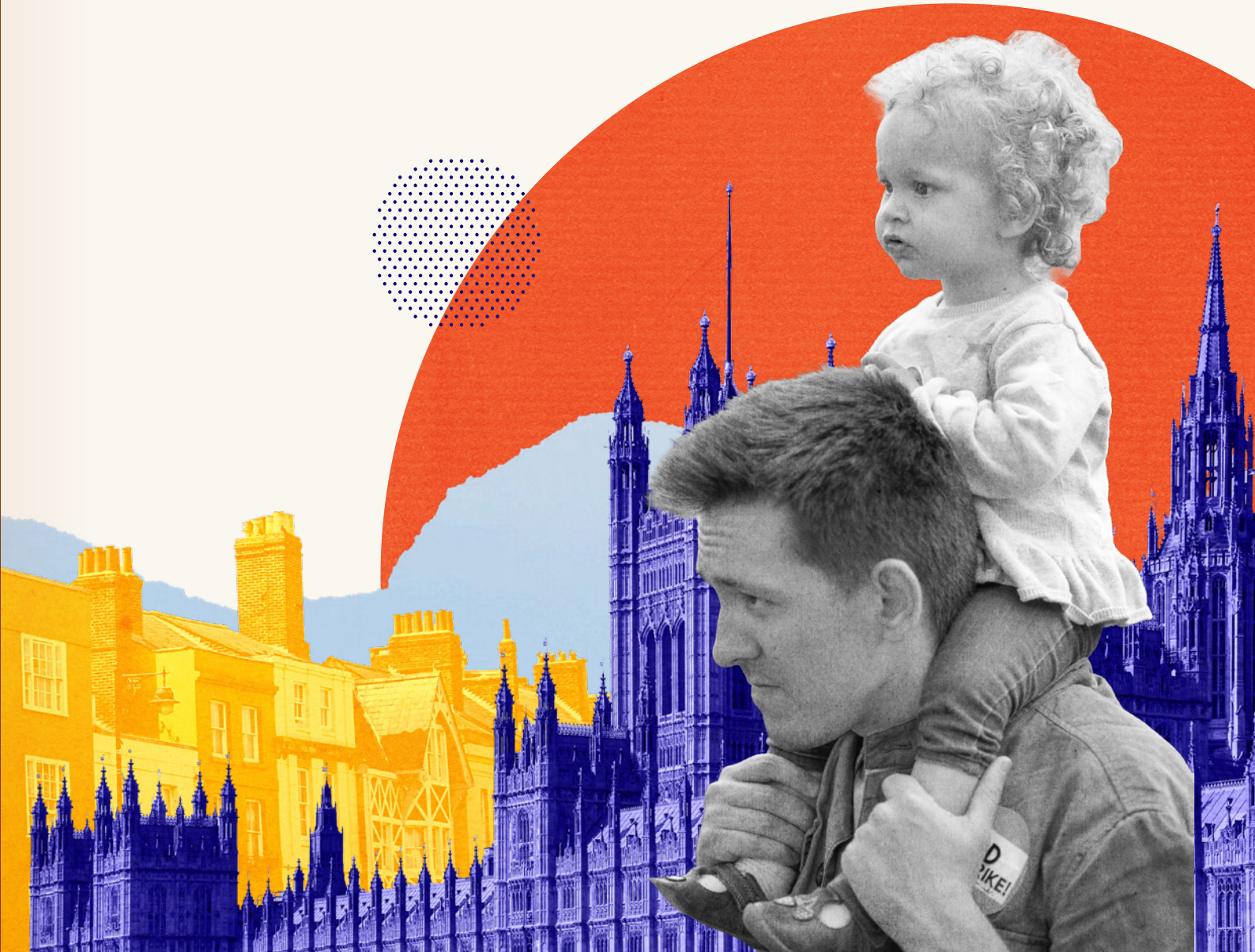
164 A.-Z. Duvander, T. Lappegård and M. Johansson (2020). Impact of a reform towards shared parental leave on continued fertility in Norway and Sweden. *Population Research and Policy Review*, 39(6), 1205-1229. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s11113-020-09574-y> A.-Z. Duvander et al (2019). Parental leave policies and continued childbearing in Iceland, Norway, and Sweden. *Demographic Research*, 40, 1501-1528. <https://doi.org/10.4054/DemRes.2019.40.51>

165 S. Cools, J.H. Fiva and L.J. Kirkebøen (2015). Causal effects of paternity leave on children and parents. *Scandinavian Journal of Economics*, 117(3), 801-828. <https://doi.org/10.1111/sjoe.12113> R.K. Hart, S.N. Andersen and N. Drange (2022). Effects of extended paternity leave on family dynamics. *Journal of Marriage and Family*, 84(3), 814-839. <https://doi.org/10.1111/jomf.12818>

166 L. Farré and L. González (2019). Does paternity leave reduce fertility? *Journal of Public Economics*, 172, 52-66. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jpubeco.2018.12.002>

What this means for the UK

A well-paid six-week entitlement may remove some of the constraints on further childbearing, by enabling fathers to share care more substantially. However, existing evidence suggests that fertility responses are highly dependent on birth order, employment and earnings, and wider family policy conditions. It is therefore not currently possible to predict an aggregate fertility effect for the UK.



The evidence set out in this report is drawn overwhelmingly from other countries, and much of it evaluates reforms that changed several things at once. When considering the reform of parental leave policies, it is reasonable to ask how far these findings travel, to whom they apply, and how much weight the headline numbers can bear. This section addresses those questions directly, and in each case we set out both what the evidence supports and where more evidence is needed or where caution needs to be taken.

DOES INTERNATIONAL EVIDENCE TRANSFER TO THE UK?

The strongest causal evidence comes from Denmark, Germany, Spain, Sweden, Norway, Iceland and Quebec, and many of these countries' welfare systems, childcare infrastructure, labour markets and gender norms differ from those of the UK. Direct read-across is therefore uncertain, and effect sizes observed may or may not be replicated here.

Two considerations qualify for this. First, there is UK-specific evidence pointing in the same direction: Bacheron (working paper) finds that mothers' employment rates and hours both rose following the introduction of paternity leave in the UK, placing it alongside Italy and the Netherlands among the countries showing gains at both the extensive and intensive margins, though some coefficients fall short of conventional significance, and the concurrent maternity leave reform means the effect cannot be cleanly attributed. Second, the UK is starting from an unusually low base – two weeks at a flat rate that replaces a fraction of the minimum wage, with take-up constrained by cost for the majority of families. Where many other countries were reforming from an already substantial entitlement, the **UK would be moving from near-zero, which, if anything, can imply that larger marginal returns could be made in comparison to some of the other countries' examples.**

CAN WE ISOLATE WHAT IS DRIVING THE EFFECTS?

The Danish, Quebec and German reforms all combined extended leave with wage replacement at meaningful rates, and in several cases with non-transferability. This makes it difficult to identify the independent contribution of **duration, generosity or earmarking**. The practical implication is a warning rather than a weakness: because **positive outcomes are consistently tied to the combination, implementing one element without the others**, for example, extending duration while leaving pay at the current flat rate, should be expected to yield substantially weaker effects, and possibly none. The evidence cannot tell us precisely which ingredient matters most; it can tell us that partial reform is unlikely to deliver the returns modelled here.

Relatedly, the causal evidence on the optimal length of **solo**, non-transferable leave periods taken independently of the mother rather than concurrently, remains limited, despite this being the design feature most consistently associated with durable change in fathers' involvement. Different studies point to two weeks, one month and two months as thresholds. The six-week recommendation is best understood as a policy judgement informed by this evidence and by UK-calibrated modelling, rather than an empirically established tipping point.

WILL THE REFORM RESULT IN BENEFITING ALL PARENTS ACROSS THE SOCIO-ECONOMIC STRATA?

There is limited and sometimes mixed evidence around the heterogeneity in the effect of policies across different socio-economic groups, and even less so across different family types. Frodermann et al found that Germany's daddy months had their strongest effect (ie positive long-run earnings for mothers) in couples where the mother had high pre-birth earnings – encouraging in terms of the size of returns, but a genuine equity concern. Existing studies frequently lack the statistical power to identify effects at the lower end of the income distribution separately.

The UK's own experience is instructive: HMRC data shows that 33% of Shared Parental Leave claims come from the highest income decile and effectively none from the bottom two.

The critical variable is a pay design. JRF's modelling finds the economic gains from a six-week, 90% entitlement concentrate among lower- and middle-income households, precisely because higher-income fathers already access enhanced employer schemes and have less room to increase take-up. Therefore, a reform that extends duration while keeping pay low and flat is likely to benefit high-earning dual-career couples most; **a reform that raises the replacement rate is likely to be more inclusive and benefit across the socio-economic strata.**

HOW MUCH WEIGHT CAN THE UK COST-BENEFIT ESTIMATES BEAR?

Clifton-Sprigg et al's estimate of £12.8 billion in annual net social benefits assumes 74% take-up among eligible fathers, 90% wage replacement with no upper cap. It includes monetised wellbeing gains, some of which are more contestable (and long term) – not only in their effect, but also in their monetary values – than labour market effects, as mentioned in our previous section. The narrower estimate within the same study, approximately £672 million arising solely from labour market effects, is the more conservative and defensible figure and is based on extant literature, indicating a more consistent result. JRF's £2.68 billion, modelled on a capped entitlement, sits between the two. These are not competing claims so much as different scopes and assumptions, and this report treats the labour market effects as the firmest ground.



Beyond the challenges addressed above, substantial empirical gaps remain. Most concern groups currently excluded or underserved by existing maternity, paternity and parental leave policies, or questions that only become answerable once reforms have been in place long enough to evaluate. Collectively, these gaps highlight the need for more inclusive, intersectional and system-aware research capable of capturing the full diversity of parental experiences, and each is an argument for building evaluation into reform rather than for delaying it.

PARENTS OUTSIDE STANDARD EMPLOYMENT

There is limited knowledge regarding parents who are ineligible for leave and pay due to short tenure, discontinuous employment or self-employment, as well as student status, who fall outside standard entitlements. Evidence is also scarce for parents in low-paid and precarious work, creating a potential bias in the literature towards women who benefit from occupational maternity pay, and leaving less understood the experiences of those with the least security and fewest rights. Research on entrepreneur-parents is exceptionally limited: we know relatively little about how female entrepreneurs manage maternity,¹⁶⁷ and virtually no evidence exists on how male entrepreneurs navigate new fatherhood. Given that a substantial proportion of fathers are self-employed or run small businesses,¹⁶⁸ this gap is particularly pressing. The role of eligibility criteria in shaping take-up likewise requires deeper investigation; widening eligibility could itself substantially increase participation, yet this remains underexplored.

INTERSECTIONAL GAPS

Existing research pays insufficient attention to ethnically diverse mothers and fathers, despite well-documented disparities in maternal health outcomes for ethnic minority women. Emerging findings suggest that ethnically diverse women are more likely to take pregnancy-related sick leave and that international nurses may require distinct forms of support to mitigate isolation¹⁶⁹ and compensate for the lack of extended family networks, particularly as migrants may be unable to bring grandparents to the UK.¹⁷⁰

Evidence is similarly thin for disabled parents, LGBTQ+ families and migrant parents, pointing to an urgent need for a more intersectional approach in future studies. We also need more analysis of occupational and household income/class variation in the take-up and impact of leave on families.¹⁷¹

Filling these gaps matters beyond descriptive completeness: without this evidence, we cannot know whether the economic and wellbeing gains modelled elsewhere in this brief are shared broadly across the population, or concentrated among groups who are already better positioned to benefit.

¹⁶⁷ J. Rouse, J. Atkinson and A. Rowe (2021). Peering inside mutual adjustment: Rhythmanalysis of return to work from maternity leave. *International Small Business Journal*, 39(8), 709-731.

¹⁶⁸ Small Business Survey – UK Government. (2025). *Longitudinal Small Business Survey 2024: businesses with no employees*. GOV.UK. <https://www.gov.uk/government/statistics/small-business-survey-2024-businesses-with-no-employees/longitudinal-small-business-survey-2024-businesses-with-no-employee>

¹⁶⁹ T. Sterud, T. Tynes, I.S. Mehlum, K.B. Veiersted, B. Bergbom, A. Airila... and M.A. Flyvholm (2018). A systematic review of working conditions and occupational health among immigrants in Europe and Canada. *BMC public health*, 18(1), 770. I. Brekke, J.E. Berg, L. Sletner and A.K. Jenum (2013). Doctor-certified sickness absence in first and second trimesters of pregnancy among native and immigrant women in Norway. *Scandinavian journal of public health*, 41(2), 166-173.

¹⁷⁰ C. Pressley, D. Newton, L. Sanderson, B. Simkhada, J. Stephenson, P.A. Duodu... and J. Garside (2025). International nurse migration experience of the first two years: A mixed methods study. *Journal of advanced nursing*, 81(5), 2672-2686.

¹⁷¹ H. Chung (2021). *Shared care, father's involvement in care and family well-being outcomes: A literature review* (Government Equalities Office).

SECTOR-SPECIFIC EFFECTS AND SMALL EMPLOYERS

Research on sector-specific effects remains sparse, especially for SMEs, where management capacity and resources differ fundamentally from those of larger employers. Existing evidence¹⁷² highlights major gaps in how small firms navigate maternity and paternity responsibilities, and few studies have since followed. We need further action research to adapt interventions to varied SME contexts and to understand the conditions under which they are adopted and effective. Structural changes to enterprise ecosystems may also be necessary to ensure sustained uptake. This is correspondingly the area where consultation and piloting with smaller employers matter most.

ORGANISATIONAL CONTEXT AND WORKPLACE PENALTIES

We also need more evidence around the company/organisational and national context in which paternity leave does or does not result in penalties. Although some qualitative work exists,¹⁷³ quantitative analysis of experimental vignettes of managerial perspectives,¹⁷⁴ or of company HR data from organisations where such policies have been introduced, would be useful in assessing the consequences of policy take-up across different organisational settings.

POLICY INTERACTIONS AND PARENTS' WORK-CARE CHOICES

Better understanding of the potential work-caregiving choices of parents under different policy settings is also useful to capture: what level of provision, and what policy configurations, would allow fathers to take up leave and help shape a more equal division of paid and unpaid labour. Parental leave does not operate in isolation, and there is a shortage of research on how leave policies interact with other systems, including childcare provision, flexible working arrangements, workplace culture and employer expectations.¹⁷⁵ Even progressive leave systems may have limited long-term impact on gender inequality if households revert to traditional arrangements once leave ends, or if companies maintain long-hours, work-devotion cultures.¹⁷⁶ Robust evidence is needed on how parental leave reforms align with affordable, high-quality childcare, as well as with gendered workplace norms that continue to penalise caregiving.

172 B. Stumbitz, S. Lewis and J. Rouse (2018). Maternity management in SMEs: A transdisciplinary review and research agenda. *International Journal of Management Reviews*, 20(2), 500-522. S. Lewis, B. Stumbitz, L. Miles and J. Rouse (2014). Maternity Protection in SMEs: An International Review. Geneva: International Labour Office. https://www.ilo.org/sites/default/files/wcmsp5/groups/public/@dgreports/@dcommn/@publ/documents/publication/wcms_312783.pdf

173 J. Kelland, D. Lewis and V. Fisher (2022). Viewed with suspicion, considered idle and mocked – working caregiving fathers and fatherhood forfeits. *Gender, Work and Organization*, 29(5), 1578-1593. C. Gatrell (2025). The 'paternal body': Reviewing the corporeal impact of new fatherhood on employed men. *International Journal of Management Reviews*, 27(1), 12-33. A. Menzel (2025). When and how long? Anxiety and uncertainty in expectant fathers' negotiation of paternity leave from work in the UK. *Social and Cultural Geography*, 1-24.

174 A. Kasperska, A. Matysiak and E. Cukrowska-Torzewska (2024). Managerial (dis)preferences towards employees working from home: Post-pandemic experimental evidence. *PLoS ONE*, 19(5), e0303307. S. Wang and H. Chung (2026). Revisiting flexibility stigma: How framing remote working shapes bias against remote workers. *Gender, Work & Organization*, Online first. L. Hipp (2025). Damned if you do, damned if you don't? Experimental evidence from Germany on hiring discrimination against mothers with short family leave. *Work and Occupations*, 07308884251360325. E. Cukrowska-Torzewska, A. Kasperska, A. Matysiak and G. Kaufman (2025). Employers' discrimination against fathers and mothers taking parental leave: Evidence from a choice experiment (No. 2025-27).

175 H. Chung and M. Van der Horst (2018). Women's employment patterns after childbirth and perceived access to and use of flexitime and teleworking. *Human Relations*, 71(1), 47-72. H. Chung (2024). *Flexible working arrangements and gender equality in Europe*. Publications Office of the European Union.

176 Y.S. Kim (2023). A study on the effects of gendered social norms on the tradeoff between paid and unpaid work in Korea. *Journal of Family and Economic Issues*, 44(4), 870-882. E. Oh and E. Mun (2022). Compensatory work devotion: How a culture of overwork shapes women's parental leave in South Korea. *Gender and Society*, 36(4), 552-577.

A further gap concerns our limited causal evidence on optimal lengths of "solo" leave for fathers – non-transferable periods taken independently rather than alongside a partner¹⁷⁷ and the extent to which such leave shapes mothers' labour market outcomes, including return-to-work patterns and long-term engagement, and child development outcomes.

HEALTH OUTCOMES

There is not yet enough evidence on the health effects of paternity leave, largely because the relevant reforms have been introduced recently, and existing reviews found the evidence on paternity leave and parental mental health inconclusive.¹⁷⁸ Given that potential savings from reduced perinatal mental illness and maternal sickness absence are among the larger indirect benefits identified in this report, this is a priority for future evaluation, rather than a reason to discount the mechanism.

LONG RUN AND MACRO-ECONOMIC EFFECTS

Most studies focus on employment probabilities or earnings within two to three years. There is less causal evidence on truly long-run outcomes – eg ten-to-twenty-year earnings trajectories, pension accumulation, career progression or children's outcomes, which matter independently. This is important because if paternity leave can impact children's cognitive and behavioural outcomes in the long term, this can have a long-lasting impact on the economy and society. Such analysis also needs to take into account not only the direct impact of leave on couples' income, but also its impact via equitable childcare, enhanced couple relationship satisfaction and declining relationship dissolution. Other areas lacking rigorous causal evidence include long-term macro-economic effects such as productivity, fiscal sustainability and growth, as well as regional inequalities, household composition and disability-related disparities. Research is also limited on how leave systems interact with innovation and entrepreneurship, particularly where inadequate protection restricts both mothers' and fathers' ability to engage in self-employment.

177 M. O'Brien and K. Wall (eds) (2016). *Comparative Perspectives on Work-Life Balance and Gender Equality: Fathers on Leave Alone*. London: Springer. E. Banister, B. Kerrane and J. Wilson (2026). Legacies of fathers' solo leave: Dual-career couples and dynamic linked care(ers). *Human Relations*. <https://doi.org/10.1177/00187267261462035>

178 A. Heshmati, H. Honkaniemi and S.P. Juárez (2023). The effect of parental leave on parents' mental health: A systematic review. *The Lancet Public Health*, 8(1), e57-e75. L.F. Philpott, J. Goodwin and M. M. Saab (2022). Paternal leave and fathers' mental health: A rapid literature review. *International Journal of Men's Social and Community Health*, 5(SPI), 29-49.

CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

WHAT THE EVIDENCE ADDS UP TO

This report aims to provide a scoping review of the extant literature on the economic benefits of extending and properly paying paternity leave, to examine the validity and rigour of that evidence, and to consider what it would mean for the UK. The conclusion of our review is that many of the key points raised in the larger economic benefit analyses carried out in the UK – for example by the Joseph Rowntree Foundation, Clifton-Sprigg et al and the Centre for Progressive Policy – rest on a rigorous and solid evidence base from across the world.

More specifically, we have ample evidence to be pretty certain that well-paid, earmarked parental leave will change not only fathers' behaviours but also their attitudes, making the household division of unpaid labour more equitable – changes that persist long after the leave itself has ended. The evidence also stacks up with regards to how this shift at home will support mothers' employment rates and their capacity to work full time, making the division of paid labour more equitable in turn.

Because the gender division of care is what underpins so much of the bias mothers face at work, this has a wider bearing on gender equality across society: when caring is no longer something only women are expected to do, and concurrently breadwinning only associated with men, the bias that drive inequalities in hiring, pay and promotion is likely to be removed, which can further remove barriers to enhance economic growth for the country.

Beyond this core pathway, we found good evidence, though potentially with lesser certainty, that paternity leave supports parents' health and wellbeing, and strengthens the stability of couple relationships. What is more, via the impact leave has on fathers' involvement in care, we can anticipate potentially long-lasting impacts on children's emotional and psychological wellbeing as well as cognitive development, which again may not only reduce social costs but enable economic growth in the future.

The strength of the evidence differs across these channels, as the preceding section sets out, and the case does not rest on the weakest of them. It rests on what is close to certain: that fathers take reserved leave, that it changes what they do at home, and that mothers' employment and earnings improve as a result. That alone is sufficient to make the economic case. What the multi-channel picture adds is this: the returns to reform accrue to different parts of government. The Treasury may see additional tax receipts from higher maternal employment. The Department of Health sees reduced perinatal illness and sickness absence, and potential wellbeing benefits for parents and children. The Department for Education sees children better prepared for school. The Department for Work and Pensions and Department of Justice see fewer costs from family breakdown. Parental leave is routinely evaluated as a line item on one departmental budget, when it is in fact an investment whose returns are collected across several, benefiting society in multiple ways.

WHAT THIS MEANS FOR THE UK

Three features of the UK's starting position shape how this evidence should be read.

- 1. The UK is not adjusting to an adequate system; it is building one.** Where comparator countries have been reforming from a substantial base, the UK would be moving from a position of offering fathers minimal rights, which implies the marginal returns to reform here are likely to be larger, not smaller, than those observed elsewhere.
- 2. The UK has already run the counterfactual.** Shared Parental Leave is a natural experiment in what happens when leave is made available but is transferable and poorly paid, and take-up has been negligible and heavily concentrated among the highest earners. SPL reform provides evidence that leave reform **without adequate pay and non-transferability** fails, which is precisely what the international literature predicts.
- 3. The UK's gains would be concentrated where they are most needed.** Because many higher-income fathers already access enhanced employer schemes, the increase in take-up from a well-paid statutory entitlement is likely to fall disproportionately among lower- and middle-income households. Reform designed around pay, rather than duration alone, is therefore a distributional policy as well as a growth one.



WHAT REFORMS SHOULD LOOK LIKE

There are three primary barriers to men's participation in parental leave: financial constraints, such as low leave pay; entrenched gender norms that frame caregiving as primarily maternal; and gendered or inadequately designed policies, including leave that is too short, predominantly reserved for mothers, transferable rather than non-transferable, or structured so that fathers can take it simultaneously with mothers. **Reform must address all three. Partial reform, for example: extending duration while leaving pay at the flat statutory rate, or raising pay without making leave non-transferable, should be expected to deliver substantially weaker results.**

PATERNITY LEAVE SHOULD BE WELL REMUNERATED

Take-up of paternity leave is highest when it is well remunerated and specifically for the use of fathers. Shared Parental Leave take-up has remained at around 4% of eligible fathers in the UK, and surveys consistently show financial reasons as the primary barrier – the current pay rate does not cover essential living costs for most families, not even close. Without raising the pay rate substantially, extending the duration of entitlement will not translate into actual leave taking, especially in lower-income households. As fathers remain the primary breadwinner in the majority of heterosexual coupled families, pay level is the critical determinant of whether leave is taken at all.

Adequate pay is also what makes uptake socially broad rather than concentrated among the already advantaged. Insufficient wage replacement entrenches both gendered and class divisions of caregiving by limiting genuine access for lower-income fathers, with consequences for inequalities in children's outcomes.

This is consistent with the academic literature: adequately paid paternity leave of meaningful duration is associated with maternal labour market gains and a smaller gender pay gap. Reform creating entitlements or expansion of duration without adequate pay is unlikely to bring about the positive changes outlined in this report.

PATERNITY LEAVE SHOULD BE NON-TRANSFERABLE

The research – particularly the Quebec evidence – suggests that **non-transferable** leave reserved for fathers (rather than shared leave parents can divide as they choose) is more effective at changing behaviour and shifting gender norms. Evidence from OECD countries demonstrates that fathers generally take the length of leave reserved exclusively for them, rather than sharing more equally when leave is left gender-neutral; even in countries with high levels of gender equality, fathers account for only around 20-30% of total leave days taken. Fathers' uptake is consistently lower wherever leave can be transferred between parents.

The UK's Shared Parental Leave system already exists in principle, but has failed precisely because it is transferable and poorly paid.

A genuine daddy quota with adequate pay would more closely replicate the conditions that produced the strongest results in the literature. Non-transferability is also the mechanism through which norm change operates; because fathers cannot simply hand their weeks back to mothers, families are moved into a new arrangement and update their beliefs about what is appropriate and feasible. A transferable system explicitly avoids this mechanism.

PATERNITY LEAVE SHOULD BE LONGER AND TAKEN SOLO

The literature points to the importance of longer leave for creating long-term change in behaviour and gaining the strongest results. CPP et al's recommendation of a six-week paternity leave is intuitively plausible – short leave of one or two weeks is unlikely to change household dynamics or employer perceptions, while longer leave probably does, but the threshold effect is unclear.¹⁷⁹ Other studies point to the importance of at least two weeks, one month or two months.¹⁸⁰ The recommendation of six weeks at 90% of average weekly earnings draws on UK-calibrated modelling and on international evidence that longer, better-paid leave produces stronger and more persistent shifts in household behaviour; it is best understood as a policy judgement balancing evidence with feasibility, rather than a firmly established tipping point.

The length of time fathers spend in solo care also matters. Leave taken independently, rather than concurrently with the mother, has a substantially greater impact on fathers' involvement in the later years of a child's life, and it is this that produces the caring effects underpinning the economic, social and equality benefits described in this report. Sequential rather than simultaneous take-up is also what some of the economic benefit modelling assumes: the labour market benefits depend on paternity leave enabling mothers' earlier return to work or increased hours.

179 Centre for Progressive Policy et al. *Leave in the lurch*, p17.

180 Nepomnyaschy and Waldfogel, Paternity leave and fathers' involvement with their young children. Reimer and Pfau-Effinger; Different types of parental leave use by German fathers. Romero-Balsa et al, Policemen on Leave Alone in Spain.

PATERNITY LEAVE AND PAY SHOULD BE ACCESSIBLE

Crucially, any new system should also prevent the emergence of a divide between parents with generous entitlements and those with very limited rights, including individuals in precarious work or studying. There are currently profound inequities in leave eligibility and entitlements which are shaped by contract type¹⁸¹ and organisational knowledge gaps.¹⁸² Leave and pay should be accessible to the self-employed, workers on fixed-term, zero-hours and temporary contracts.

CULTURAL CHANGE IS KEY

Take-up of leave is shaped by the perceptions surrounding leave taking. Fathers in the UK currently believe employers view paternity leave unfavourably, and may penalise those who take it, with substantial proportions of fathers citing fears about career progression and about appearing less committed. Given existing UK cultural patterns of stigma towards men who take up leave in many industries, a modest voluntary extension is unlikely to shift norms quickly. The international evidence shows these penalties are conditional rather than inevitable: they are greatest where paternity leave taking remains culturally non-normative, and they diminish or disappear where it has become common and expected. Duvander and Johansson's Swedish evidence and the Nordic experience more broadly suggest that norm change follows policy, but it takes time and is accelerated when leave is non-transferable and well paid.¹⁸³ Kleven et al in their working paper provide the large-scale causal evidence that paternity leave can shift gendered beliefs about childcare and gender roles, and that this belief change drives subsequent labour market outcomes, rather than just mechanical time reallocation.¹⁸⁴ Critically, this effect operates through the non-transferability of the leave – the fact that fathers cannot simply hand their weeks back to mothers, forces families into a new arrangement and updates their beliefs about what is appropriate and feasible.

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A FINAL WORD

The provision of well-paid, earmarked leave for fathers is not a welfare issue. It is an economic imperative that needs to be addressed if the UK is to take its productivity problem and its industrial strategy seriously. It should not, therefore, be viewed as a cost to government, but as an investment that addresses a systematic barrier hindering gender equality, societal wellbeing and economic growth alike.

The timing matters. Women are now more likely than men to hold higher education qualifications, yet the labour market continues to lose their skills at precisely the point where they are most needed.

Sectors across the economy are facing disruption and skills shortages, while a substantial and highly qualified pool of potential returners remains outside paid work. And underlying both is a set of traditional gender norms about who cares at home and who earns at work, that actively obstructs the systems change the labour market requires. We are at a turning point. Reforming paternity leave will not solve all of these problems on its own, but it can provide a significant impetus, and the normative change it sets in motion would benefit many aspects of society at once.

There is also an unexpected advantage in having been a policy laggard with regards to parental leave reform. Because the UK has held back while Europe and the OECD have reformed, we now have an unusually rich international evidence base on what works, what does not, and under what conditions, evidence that was not available to the countries that moved first. Very few policy questions of this significance come with this much accumulated knowledge attached. What we now need to do is learn from that evidence with confidence, and make the reform that is badly needed and long overdue.



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APPENDIX 1: SEARCH STRATEGY AND STUDY SELECTION

This report draws on a scoping review of the academic and policy literature on parental leave, paternity leave, and their economic, social and equality impacts.

Databases and sources

Searches were conducted in Scopus and Google Scholar. These were supplemented by hand-searching reference lists of key studies (backward citation searching) and by tracking papers that cited these studies (forward citation searching), as well as targeted searches of grey literature from relevant think tanks and international bodies (eg OECD, ILO).

Search terms

Search strings combined terms across three concept groups: (i) the policy, eg “paternity leave”, “fathers’ leave”, “parental leave”, “shared parental leave”, “daddy quota”, “earmarked leave”; (ii) the population/actors, eg “fathers”, “dual-earner couples”, “co-parenting”; and (iii) the outcomes of interest, eg “labour market participation”, “gender pay gap”, “maternal employment”, “child development”, “mental health”, “relationship stability”, “economic growth”, “productivity”.

An example combined string: (“paternity leave” OR “fathers’ leave” OR “earmarked leave”) AND (“labour market” OR gender pay gap” OR “maternal employment” OR “child development” OR “economic growth”).

Date range and language

Searches were limited to studies published between 2000 and 2026 (with some studies using data starting from the 1990s), with the exception of a small number of foundational theoretical texts identified through citation searching. Searches were conducted in English and covered predominantly EU, North American and OECD countries.

Inclusion and exclusion criteria

Studies were included if they: (i) examined statutory, employer-provided or policy-reform paternity/parental leave; (ii) reported empirical findings (quantitative) on labour market, economic, health, wellbeing or child development outcomes; and (iii) were peer-reviewed academic articles, working papers, or reports from recognised research or policy institutions. Studies were excluded if they were opinion pieces, non-English language, or focused solely on maternity leave without reference to fathers/co-parents.

APPENDIX 2: EVIDENCE SUMMARY TABLE

This section presents the 33 key studies underpinning the evidence reviewed in this report, covering the economic, labour market and social effects of paternity and parental leave. The studies span reforms and natural experiments in Sweden, Norway, Denmark, Iceland, Germany, France, Spain, Poland, Canada, the UK and the US, and draw predominantly on quasi-experimental methods, including difference-in-differences, regression discontinuity and natural experiment designs, that allow for causal identification of leave policy effects.

For each study, the table records the year of publication, author(s), journal or source, broad theme and sub-themes, country and time period studied, dataset used, type and pay replacement rate of the leave policy examined, outcome variables, study design, key findings, strengths, limitations, publication status, and a link to the source.

The studies cover three broad thematic areas: economic outcomes (eg maternal and paternal earnings, employment and labour force participation), social outcomes (eg division of household labour, relationship stability, fertility and child development), and studies spanning both.

STUDY 1	
Duvander, A.Z. & Johansson, M. (2012) — What are the effects of reforms promoting fathers' parental leave use?	
Journal	Journal of European Social Policy
Broad theme	Social
Sub-theme(s)	Division of household labour/leave
Country Studied	Sweden
Time Period Studied	1995 (first reserved month), 2002 (second reserved month), 2008 (gender equality bonus)
Data	Register data from the Swedish Social Insurance Agency (all parents residing in Sweden)
Leave Type Studied	Daddy quota (non-transferable leave within shared parental leave); Financial sharing incentive (no reserved period) – 2008 bonus
Pay Replacement Rate of Leave Studied	~80% of prior earnings (up to a ceiling) for the reserved months. Gender equality bonus (2008): tax credit for equal sharing — indirect financial incentive, not a replacement rate.
Outcome Variables	Parental leave use by fathers; division of parental leave between parents
Study Design	Difference-in-differences (DiD); comparing parents of children born just before and just after each reform
Key Findings	Strong effect on father leave use from introduction of first reserved month (1995). More modest but clear effect from second reserved month (2002). No effect from gender equality bonus (2008). Reserved time (non-transferable) more effective than financial bonus; change from low baseline may be easier; first-introduced reforms may have greatest impact.
Key Strengths	Population-level register data; tests three different policy designs; long time horizon; allows comparison of reform types
Key Limitations	Focuses on leave use (intermediate outcome), not downstream labour market or social outcomes; cannot fully explain why bonus had no effect
Publication Status	Peer-reviewed
Link	https://doi.org/10.1177/0958928712440201

STUDY 2		Kluge, J., & Tamm, M. (2013) — Parental leave regulations, mothers' labor force attachment and fathers' childcare involvement: evidence from a natural experiment.
Journal	Journal of Population Economics	
Broad theme	Both	
Sub-theme(s)	Maternal/paternal earnings/employment; Household income/gender wage gap; Division of household labour/leave	
Country Studied	Germany	
Time Period Studied	2007 reform and they consider 10 months, 1 year, 1.5 years, and 2 years after birth	
Data	data that were author self-collected in May 2008 among parents with children born in first quarter of 2007 (Q1/07, the treatment group) and parents with children born in the last quarter of 2006 (Q4/06, the control group). The survey was implemented in cooperation with two health insurance funds (AOK Rheinland, AOK Sachsen-Anhalt), in order to have a uniform data base for the addresses of treatment and control groups.	
Leave Type Studied	2007 reform in general including the effects of daddy months on fathers' involvement in childcare	
Pay Replacement Rate of Leave Studied	offers a 67% replacement rate of previous net labor earnings (from employment or self-employment) for either father or mother for up to 12 months postpartum	
Outcome Variables	Maternal labour force participation/employment; Paternal earnings/employment; Household income/gender wage gap; Division of household labour/leave	
Study Design	RD and compare parents giving birth during the last months of 2006 (the control group) with parents giving birth during the first months of 2007 (the treatment group receiving the Elterngeld benefit)	
Key Findings	1. no any significant effects on fathers' employment rates in the survey. 2.fathers seem to be incentivized to take advantage of parental leave benefits. But most men only take 2 months of Elterngeld 3.taking Elterngeld is associated with higher father involvement in childcare within treatment group, but the treatment–control comparison among mothers shows only a small, mostly insignificant increase in fathers' childcare share.	
Key Strengths	quasi-experiment design using unique data from a survey that was specifically designed to cover these two groups of parents around the discontinuity; various outcomes;	
Key Limitations	cannot distangle the effect of the length or replacement rate on its impact so its findings regarding mothers' labour force supply is mostly through the story of women side not about how it shapes men to change their employment and cannot actually claim this as so many policies happen at the same time	
Publication Status	Peer-reviewed	
Link	https://link.springer.com/article/10.1007/s00148-012-0404-1#Sec1	

STUDY 3		Rege, M., & Solli, I. F. (2013) — The impact of paternity leave on fathers' future earnings.
Journal	Demography	
Broad theme	Economic	
Sub-theme(s)	Paternal earnings/employment	
Country Studied	Norway	
Time Period Studied	Main:1992–2000; extended robustness: 1986–2000. Children/fathers followed until youngest child is up to age 8; earnings effects observed up to when the child is age 5.	
Data	Norwegian administrative registry data from Statistics Norway, covering annual records on earnings, demographics, education, employment status, children's birth dates, and family characteristics. Analytical sample: 1,126,643 father-year observations, 261,298 fathers.	
Leave Type Studied	Daddy quota (4-week reserved paternity leave) plus a shared leave pool	
Pay Replacement Rate of Leave Studied	Norwegian parental leave during the study period: 100% of prior earnings for 44 weeks, or 80% of prior earnings for 54 weeks (parents' choice). Sickness absence itself is compensated at 100% of prior earnings by national insurance.	
Outcome Variables	fathers' long-term earnings; mothers labour force supply	
Study Design	DID: treated fathers are those whose youngest child was born after 1994. 1993–1994 cohorts are treated during phase-in. Includes year and child-age fixed effects, controls, clustered standard errors. .	
Key Findings	1. the paternity-leave quota had a significant negative effect on fathers' earnings until the last point of observation when the child is 5 years old. Fathers, on average, earn 1 % to 3 % less as a direct consequence of the paternity-leave quota (expose to the policy without considering actual take up). When considering actual take up this raises to 1.8 % to 4.5 %. 2. this negative effect is stronger for fathers who have not completed high school. Adjusting for relevant uptake rates, these fathers experiences a 3.3 % drop in earnings, compared with 2.7 % for high school graduates and 1.1 % for university graduates (treatment effect of fathers do taking the leave, not just exposed to the policy) 3. but they do not find any effect of the paternity-leave quota on mothers' labor supply	
Key Strengths	register data, large sample, experimental design; distinguishes ITT and TOT; addresses other overlapping family-policy reforms	
Key Limitations	Does not directly observe father involvement, so the reason for lower earnings are unknown. Treatment is not individual random assignment and uptake is incomplete.	
Publication Status	Peer-reviewed	
Link	https://read.dukeupress.edu/demography/article/50/6/2255/169608/The-Impact-of-Paternity-Leave-on-Fathers-Future	

STUDY 4		Bratberg, E. & Naz, G. (2014) — Does Paternity Leave Affect Mothers' Sickness Absence?
Journal	European Sociological Review	
Broad theme	Social	
Sub-theme(s)	Maternal health/wellbeing	
Country Studied	Norway	
Time Period Studied	1992–2003 (4-week paternity quota period)	
Data	Full population administrative panel data ('FD-Trygd' database, Statistics Norway), 1992–2004. Balanced 6-year panel of married/cohabiting women giving birth to one child in 1996-1999 (N=30,307); women observed 4 years before and after birth (excluding the birth year itself and one buffer year on each side).	
Leave Type Studied	Daddy quota (4-week reserved paternity leave) plus a shared leave pool	
Pay Replacement Rate of Leave Studied	Norwegian parental leave during the study period: 100% of prior earnings for 44 weeks, or 80% of prior earnings for 54 weeks (parents' choice). Sickness absence itself is compensated at 100% of prior earnings by national insurance.	
Outcome Variables	Mothers' sickness absence (incidence and number of days of absences exceeding 16 days, the threshold for National Insurance Administration compensation)	
Study Design	Panel data analysis: random-effects Tobit, fixed-effects logit, fixed-effects linear probability model (LPM), and difference-in-differences (DiD) -- multiple estimators used to address selection into fathers' leave-taking	
Key Findings	No significant effect from fathers simply taking some leave (yes/no) on mothers' sickness absence in the most credible (FE and DiD) specifications. However, in the ~6% of families where fathers took leave beyond the standard paternity quota ('gender-neutral leave'), mothers' sickness absence incidence fell by 1-2 percentage points, i.e. roughly 5-10% relative to the average absence rate of about 20%. Authors interpret the quota-only leave (a few weeks) as too short to meaningfully shift fathers' childcare skills/responsibility, so only longer, voluntarily-shared leave produced a detectable effect on mothers' health-related absence.	
Key Strengths	Multiple estimators (Tobit, FE logit, FE-LPM, DiD) used to triangulate and address selection bias from the joint household decision to share leave; distinguishes the effect of quota-only leave from longer voluntarily-shared leave	
Key Limitations	Effect is concentrated in a small (6%) subgroup of families who voluntarily share leave beyond the quota, limiting generalisability to broader paternity-quota policy; no effect detected from quota-level leave alone, suggesting short reserved periods may be insufficient to shift outcomes; cannot fully rule out residual selection despite fixed-effects/DiD design, since unobserved time-varying family characteristics could still confound results; mechanism (why father involvement reduces mother's sick leave) not directly tested, only inferred	
Publication Status	Peer-reviewed	
Link	https://academic.oup.com/esr/article/30/4/500/2763461	

STUDY 5		Bünning, M. (2015) — What Happens after the 'Daddy Months'? Fathers' Involvement in Paid Work, Childcare, and Housework after Taking Parental Leave in Germany
Journal	European Sociological Review	
Broad theme	Both	
Sub-theme(s)	Father's leave uptake; Division of household labour/leave	
Country Studied	Germany	
Time Period Studied	German parental leave reform introduced in 2007; analysis uses data from 2006–2012	
Data	German Socio-Economic Panel, 2006–2012, combined with Families in Germany, 2010–2012	
Leave Type Studied	Fathers' parental leave after Germany's 2007 "daddy months" reform. The reform reserved 2 months of paid parental leave for fathers within a 14-month earnings-related parental leave scheme. The study distinguishes short leave, longer leave, joint leave, and solo leave	
Pay Replacement Rate of Leave Studied	After the 2007 reform, parents received 67% of previous earnings for up to 12 months, plus 2 additional months if both parents took at least 2 months. Since 2011, replacement was 65%	
Outcome Variables	Fathers' weekly paid working hours; fathers' daily childcare hours; fathers' daily housework hours	
Study Design	Fixed-effects panel regression using within-father changes before and after taking parental leave. This compares fathers' own time allocation before and after leave, controlling for time-invariant unobserved characteristics	
Key Findings	Fathers reallocated time from paid work to family after taking parental leave. On average, fathers reduced paid work by about 4 hours per week and increased childcare by about 1 hour per weekday after leave. Childcare increased even after short or joint leave. However, housework increased only after longer leave of more than 2 months or solo leave while the partner was working. This suggests that short daddy months can increase fathers' childcare involvement, but deeper change in the gendered division of unpaid labour requires longer or solo leave	
Key Strengths	Strong panel design; fixed effects reduce bias from stable unobserved differences between leave-taking and non-leave-taking fathers; distinguishes leave length and whether fathers take leave alone or jointly with mothers; examines paid work, childcare, and housework together	
Key Limitations	Small number of fathers observed before and after leave, limiting subgroup analysis; estimates apply mainly to fathers who selected into leave; self-reported time use may overestimate childcare and housework; cannot fully rule out time-varying selection or reverse causality; Germany-specific reform context	
Publication Status	Peer-reviewed	
Link	https://doi.org/10.1093/esr/jcv072	

STUDY 6		Cools, S., Fiva, J.H. & Kirkebøen, L.J. (2015) — Causal Effects of Paternity Leave on Children and Parents
Journal	The Scandinavian Journal of Economics	
Broad theme	Both	
Sub-theme(s)	Child outcomes; Fertility; Paternal earnings/employment; Maternal labour force participation/employment	
Country Studied	Norway	
Time Period Studied	Around the 1993 Norwegian parental leave reform that introduced a father's quota	
Data	Full-population Norwegian administrative register data (Statistics Norway). Sample restricted to parents eligible for parental leave (both parents earning above 2x the social security base amount two years pre-birth), children born within 3 months before/after April 1 in 1991 (baseline), 1992, and 1993, excluding the 2 weeks immediately around April 1 due to strategic birth-timing concerns. ~26,000-28,000 children per regression depending on outcome.	
Leave Type Studied	Daddy quota (non-transferable leave within shared parental leave)	
Pay Replacement Rate of Leave Studied	Norwegian parental leave during study period (1992-93 reforms): 100% of prior earnings for 42-44 weeks, or 80% of prior earnings for 52-54 weeks (parents' choice), capped at 6x the National Insurance basic amount (G).	
Outcome Variables	Children's school performance (standardised exam scores at end of lower-secondary school, age 16); fathers' annual earnings, full-time/part-time/overall employment; mothers' annual earnings, full-time/part-time/overall employment; family outcomes (total fertility by 2008, spacing to next child, parents' marital status when child is 14)	
Study Design	Quasi-experimental difference-in-differences, contrasting the 1993 reform (which added a 4-week father's quota plus 3 weeks of general leave) against the 1992 reform (which added only 3 weeks of general leave, no quota), both benchmarked against the no-reform year 1991, to isolate the specific effect of the father's quota from the general leave expansion	
Key Findings	The father's quota sharply increased fathers' leave-taking (from 2.6% to 24.6% of fathers immediately after the April 1, 1993 cutoff, eventually reaching 60% by 2006). Children's school performance (age 16 exam scores) improved by about 4% of a standard deviation due to the 1993 reform, concentrated almost entirely in families where the father had equal or higher education than the mother (effect ~7% of an SD in these families, not significant for families where the mother had higher education). No significant effect was found on fathers' own earnings or working hours. Mothers' labour market earnings were found to be negatively affected by the father's quota (contrasting 1993 vs 1992 reforms), driven by reduced labour force attachment -- the opposite of what policymakers intended. No effects were found on fertility, child spacing, or parental marital stability.	
Key Strengths	Clever differencing strategy (1993 vs 1992 vs 1991) that separates the father's-quota effect from the simultaneous general leave expansion, a methodological strength many single-reform studies lack; examines a broad range of outcomes (child, father, mother, and family) in one paper; explicitly tests and rules out strategic birth-timing as a confound; heterogeneity analysis by parents' relative education.	
Key Limitations	Effects on child school performance, while economically meaningful, are not estimated with great precision (often only significant at 10% level); the negative effect on mothers' earnings is an outlier relative to most of the literature and complicates a simple narrative that paternity leave benefits mothers economically; the 1993 reform unexpectedly also increased some mothers' own leave-taking (not just fathers'), which the authors address via robustness checks but cannot fully rule out as a contributing factor; findings specific to a 4-week quota in the early 1990s Norwegian context, may not generalise to longer or differently-structured quotas	
Publication Status	Peer-reviewed	
Link	https://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/full/10.1111/sjoe.12113	

STUDY 7		Andersen, S.H. (2018) — Paternity Leave and the Motherhood Penalty: New Causal Evidence.
Journal	Journal of Marriage and Family	
Broad theme	Economic	
Sub-theme(s)	Maternal earnings/wages; Household income/gender wage gap	
Country Studied	Denmark	
Time Period Studied	Five reform years: 1989, 1994, 1997, 1998, 2002	
Data	Full sample, administrative data from Statistics Denmark.	
Leave Type Studied	Daddy quota (non-transferable leave within shared parental leave)	
Pay Replacement Rate of Leave Studied	Varies by reform. 1997 reform mandated wage compensation in private sector (close to 100% for many). Earlier reforms had lower/no compensation. Key finding: only reforms with economic incentives moved outcomes.	
Outcome Variables	Within-household gender wage gap; mothers' wages; total household wage income	
Study Design	Natural experiment exploiting 5 Danish parental leave reforms; regression discontinuity (comparing first-time parents born just before/after each reform)	
Key Findings	Father's leave reduces the within-household gender wage gap by increasing mothers' wages. Father's leave also increases total household wage incomes. Reforms with economic incentives (e.g. 1997 wage-compensation mandate, 2002 reform) had positive causal effects; entitlement-only reforms without adequate pay did not.	
Key Strengths	Large administrative dataset; multiple natural experiments across different reforms; causal identification; long time horizon	
Key Limitations	Cannot isolate effect of leave duration vs. pay generosity	
Publication Status	Peer-reviewed	
Link	https://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/full/10.1111/jomf.12507	

STUDY 8		Kluge, J. & Schmitz, S. (2018) — Back to Work: Parental Benefits and Mothers' Labor Market Outcomes in the Medium Run.
Journal	ILR Review	
Broad theme	Economic	
Sub-theme(s)	Maternal labour force participation/employment	
Country Studied	Germany	
Time Period Studied	Around 2007 German parental leave reform; short run (0–2 years) and medium run (3–5 years) post-childbirth	
Data	German census data	
Leave Type Studied	Parental leave reform with daddy quota component (non-transferable leave within shared parental leave)	
Pay Replacement Rate of Leave Studied	Elterngeld (2007 reform): 67% of prior net earnings (65% for higher earners), min. €300/month, max. €1,800/month. Daddy months paid at same rate.	
Outcome Variables	Mothers' employment probability; full-time vs. part-time employment; working hours; employer continuity; job quality	
Study Design	Natural experiment exploiting 2007 German parental benefit reform	
Key Findings	Short-run results confirm prior evidence. In the medium run (years 3–5): mothers' employment probability increased by up to 10%, driven by part-time gains and full-time employment for high-income mothers. Mothers returned to previous employers at significantly higher rates; employers rewarded this with improved job quality. Benefits concentrated on medium and high income terciles; low-income mothers did not benefit.	
Key Strengths	Examines medium-run outcomes (often neglected); considers job quality and employer continuity not just employment probability	
Key Limitations	Reform bundled parental benefit generosity with daddy months – cannot isolate paternity leave effect alone; low-income mothers not benefiting is an equity concern; no long-run data	
Publication Status	Peer-reviewed	
Link	https://doi.org/10.1177/0019793917710933	

STUDY 9		Avdic, D. & Karimi, A. (2018) — Modern Family? Paternity Leave and Marital Stability
Journal	American Economic Journal: Applied Economics	
Broad theme	Both	
Sub-theme(s)	Family/relationship stability; Division of household labour/leave; Household income/gender wage gap	
Country Studied	Sweden	
Time Period Studied	Two daddy-month reforms: 1995 (first reserved month) and 2002 (second reserved month); parents of children born 12 months around each reform cutoff; couple dissolution measured up to 5 years after childbirth	
Data	Combination of Swedish administrative registers: multi-generational register (child-parent links), LOUISE register (annual individual-level data on marital status, income, education, 1992–2007), Social Insurance Agency data (individual parental leave days per child); Swedish Living Conditions Survey (ULF/SILC) for time-use analysis (N=11,000–13,000/year). Main analytical samples: N=39,444 (1995 reform); N=72,911 (2002 reform).	
Leave Type Studied	Daddy quota (non-transferable leave within shared parental leave) – 1995 reform earmarked 1 month to each parent; 2002 reform added a second earmarked month	
Pay Replacement Rate of Leave Studied	Swedish parental leave benefit during the study period: 75–90% of prior earnings (wage-replaced) for 390 days, plus 90 base-level days at a low fixed rate. In total 480 days per child. Both daddy-month quotas were drawn from the wage-replaced days, so the replacement rate for the earmarked period was 75–90% of prior earnings.	
Outcome Variables	Couple dissolution (separation/divorce 3 years after childbirth, also at 1–5 year horizons); likelihood of cohabiting couples upgrading to marriage; mothers' intra-household share of parental leave; mothers' intra-household share of household labor income; time-use variables (mothers' time with colleagues, friends, relatives; responsibility for housework)	
Study Design	Fuzzy Regression Discontinuity design (RD), using child birth date as forcing variable around January 1st 1995 and January 1st 2002 reform cutoffs. Two-stage least squares (TSLS/IV) to estimate causal effect of mother's parental leave share on couple stability. DiD supplementary analysis; placebo tests; complier characteristics analysis.	
Key Findings	Both reforms significantly reduced mothers' intra-household share of parental leave (by 3.7pp for 1995 reform and 3.3pp for 2002 reform). This reduced specialisation increased the probability of couple separation by approximately 10% at baseline (ITT: +1.4pp for 1995 reform, +0.9pp for 2002 reform). Among cohabiting couples, the reforms also decreased the likelihood of upgrading to marriage (significant for 1995 reform only). Effects driven primarily by 'traditional' couples: those where the father was the main breadwinner, women had lower education, and couples who already had previous children. No evidence that the separation effect was mediated by changes in mothers' market work or housework division. Mothers appear to have compensated with unpaid leave instead. The 1995 reform reduced mothers' intra-household income share. Tentative evidence that the adverse effects on couple stability were dampened in areas with higher local paternity leave uptake among peers, suggesting social norms mediate the short-run disruption.	
Key Strengths	Strong causal identification via fuzzy RD exploiting two separate reform cutoffs; complier analysis reveals exactly which couple types drive the results; supplementary time-use data used to test mechanisms; extensive placebo and robustness testing.	
Key Limitations	Short-run nature of the follow-up (3–5 years) means longer-run normalisation of norms (potentially reducing conflict) cannot be observed	
Publication Status	Peer-reviewed	
Link	https://www.aeaweb.org/articles?id=10.1257/app.20160426	

STUDY 10		Farré, L. & González, L. (2019) — Does Paternity Leave Reduce Fertility?
Journal		Journal of Public Economics
Broad theme		Both
Sub-theme(s)		Maternal labour force participation/employment; Fertility
Country Studied		Spain
Time Period Studied		Around 2007 introduction of 2-week paid paternity leave; up to 6 years post-reform
Data		Full sample, administrative data
Leave Type Studied		Statutory paternity leave (standalone entitlement) – 2 weeks
Pay Replacement Rate of Leave Studied		100% of prior earnings (capped at social security ceiling). Short duration (2 weeks) but high replacement rate.
Outcome Variables		Subsequent fertility (timing and likelihood of additional children); mothers' labour force attachment; fathers' desired fertility
Study Design		Regression discontinuity design (RDD)
Key Findings		Introduction of 2-week paid paternity leave led to delays in subsequent fertility; older eligible couples less likely to have additional child within 6 years. Mechanisms: increased father involvement → higher maternal labour force attachment → raised opportunity cost of additional child; men reported lower desired fertility post-reform (awareness of childcare costs or quality-quantity preference shift).
Key Strengths		RDD provides strong causal identification; rich administrative data; investigates fertility outcomes rarely studied; explores mechanisms
Key Limitations		Short leave duration (2 weeks) limits generalisability to longer leave schemes
Publication Status		Peer-reviewed
Link		https://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/pii/S0047272718302299

STUDY 11		Duvander, A.Z. & Johansson, M. (2019) — Does fathers' care spill over? Evaluating reforms in the Swedish parental leave program.
Journal		Feminist Economics
Broad theme		Social
Sub-theme(s)		Division of household labour/leave
Country Studied		Sweden
Time Period Studied		1995 reform (12-year follow-up) and 2002 reform (10-year follow-up)
Data		Swedish Social Insurance Agency data; care for sick children (CFSC) benefit records
Leave Type Studied		Daddy quota (non-transferable leave within shared parental leave)
Pay Replacement Rate of Leave Studied		~80% of prior earnings (up to a ceiling) for the reserved months studied (1995, 2002 reforms). Study focuses on behavioural spillovers rather than the financial design specifically.
Outcome Variables		Take-up of parental benefit for care of sick children (CFSC) -- used as proxy for gender equality in the home; division of CFSC between parents
Study Design		Follow-up analysis of 1995 and 2002 reserved month reforms; DiD design
Key Findings		First reserved month (1995) led to more equal leave sharing; mainly because use of CFSC benefit decreased among low-education mothers. Evidence of persistent behavioural 'spillover' effects beyond the leave period -- fathers' involvement in early childcare predicts more involved caregiving later. Reform at least partly fulfilled aim of increasing gender equality in the home.
Key Strengths		Long follow-up periods (10–12 years); uses proxy for ongoing gender equality in the home; tests spillover beyond initial leave period; population-level register data
Key Limitations		CFSC take-up is an indirect/proxy measure of gender equality; Sweden-specific; effects mainly via decrease in mothers' use rather than increase in fathers'; limited to low-education subgroup for first reform
Publication Status		Peer-reviewed
Link		https://doi.org/10.1080/13545701.2018.1474240

STUDY 12		Duvander, A.Z., Lappegård, T. and Johansson, M. (2020) — Impact of a Reform Towards Shared Parental Leave on Continued Fertility in Norway and Sweden
Journal	Population Research and Policy Review	
Broad theme	Social	
Sub-theme(s)	Fertility	
Country Studied	Norway and Sweden	
Time Period Studied	Norway father's quota introduced 1 April 1993; Sweden father's quota introduced 1 January 1995. Parents are followed for up to 10 years after the reform	
Data	Norwegian population register data from Statistics Norway; Swedish register data from the Swedish Social Insurance Agency; linked parent-child administrative data including births, parental leave, education, income, immigrant status, union status, and region	
Leave Type Studied	Father's quota / earmarked parental leave for fathers. Norway introduced a 4-week father's quota in 1993, alongside a one-month extension of total parental leave. Sweden introduced a 1-month father's quota in 1995 within the existing leave period, without extending total leave	
Pay Replacement Rate of Leave Studied	Earnings-related paid parental leave. The paper focuses on quota entitlement and fathers' leave use rather than estimating effects by replacement rate. It notes that Sweden reduced earnings replacement from 90% to 80% for much of parental leave at the time, except the mother's and father's quota	
Outcome Variables	Continued fertility: second-birth and third-birth intensities among couples who had a first or second child around the reform cutoff	
Study Design	Quasi-experimental / natural experiment design using the introduction of father's quotas. The study compares parents with children born shortly before and shortly after the reform, using Cox regressions and difference-in-differences controls for seasonal birth patterns	
Key Findings	The reforms did not increase continued fertility in Norway. In Sweden, there was no general effect on second births, but there was evidence of a temporary increase in third-birth risk among lower-income families, especially couples where the father had low income. This group also experienced the largest increase in fathers' parental leave use after the reform. The authors argue that the reform may have made shared childcare more feasible for lower-income Swedish couples, increasing the likelihood of having a third child	
Key Strengths	Strong register-based population data; compares two similar Nordic countries with different policy designs and contexts; separates second- and third-birth risks; uses reform timing as a natural experiment; directly examines heterogeneity by income and education; useful for understanding whether father quotas affect fertility through gender-equal childcare	
Key Limitations	Effects are modest and partly temporary; results are sensitive to country context and policy design; mechanisms are inferred rather than directly measured; Norway and Sweden differ in eligibility rules and reform design, making interpretation complex; findings may not generalise outside Nordic welfare states	
Publication Status	Peer-reviewed	
Link	https://doi.org/10.1007/s11113-020-09574-y	

STUDY 13		Drue Dahl, J., Ejrnæs, M. & Jørgensen, T.H. (2019) — Earmarked paternity leave and the relative income within couples
Journal	Economics Letters	
Broad theme	Economic	
Sub-theme(s)	Household income/gender wage gap	
Country Studied	Denmark	
Time Period Studied	1998 Danish reform, which increased fathers' earmarked paternity leave from 2 to 4 weeks; effects tracked up to 8 years after childbirth	
Data	Full sample, administrative data from Statistics Denmark.	
Leave Type Studied	Daddy quota (non-transferable leave within shared parental leave) – earmarked paternity leave increased from 2 to 4 weeks	
Pay Replacement Rate of Leave Studied	~100% of prior earnings up to a ceiling (Danish parental leave benefit).	
Outcome Variables	Women's relative labor income share within the couple	
Study Design	Causal/quasi-experimental design exploiting the 1998 Danish reform as a natural experiment	
Key Findings	The 1998 reform significantly increased the share of fathers taking at least four weeks of parental leave and led to an increase in women's labour income share of around 1.2 percentage points in the first two years after childbirth. The effect declines over time and remains significant until eight years after birth. The effect is primarily driven by couples in which the woman was employed in the private sector prior to childbirth.	
Key Strengths	Long follow-up period (8 years) showing persistence of the effect; identifies a specific subgroup (private-sector-employed women) driving the result, adding mechanism-level insight	
Key Limitations	Small reform (2-week increase) limits generalisability to larger leave expansions; effect size is modest (1.2pp) even though statistically robust	
Publication Status	Peer-reviewed	
Link	https://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/abs/pii/S0165176519301405	

STUDY 14		Tamm, M. (2019) — Fathers' parental leave-taking, childcare involvement and labor market participation
Journal		Labour Economics
Broad theme		Both
Sub-theme(s)		Father involvement/caregiving; Paternal earnings/employment
Country Studied		Germany
Time Period Studied		2007 Germany parental leave reform. years 2000–2015, six years after childbirth
Data		GSEOP, focusing on sample of fathers who had a first child before the reform and a higher order child after the reform
Leave Type Studied		The 2007 reform: parents are eligible to 14 months of paid leave which replaces 67% of pre-childbirth labor income of the parent who is on leave – among which 2 months are reserved as daddy's quota. they studies daddy's quota by defining fathers' uptake of leaves for a specific child if they were on leave in any of the 14 months following the birth of the child
Pay Replacement Rate of Leave Studied		67% of pre-childbirth labor income of the parent who is on leave
Outcome Variables		Fathers' time dedicated to childcare and housework and their hours of work on the labor market
Study Design		DID-like design but did not use reform itself as the treatment but use fathers' actual leave take up. they compare change among fathers who take leave after the reform and change among fathers who do not take leave after the reform in these outcomes and used father fixed effects
Key Findings		fathers' family time increases by around 1.2 h per weekday if fathers took parental leave. it also significantly increases fathers' time for childcare by 1.4 and 1.6 h on Saturdays and Sundays respectively. The increase in housework (washing, cooking, cleaning) is by 0.5 h per weekday and slightly higher on Saturdays and Sundays. For errands (shopping, trips to government agencies, etc.) there is also a significant increase on weekdays (by 0.1 h) but not on weekends. Most importantly, the increase in overall family time of fathers on weekdays, the increase in childcare on Sundays, the increase in housework on weekdays and the increase in errands on weekdays does not appear to be restricted to the time when fathers are (potentially) on leave but also persists afterwards. In addition, for childcare on Sundays and housework on weekdays the effects are even significant several years after fathers' return from leave. Fathers' leave-taking also significantly decreases fathers' hours of work by 4.1 h per week.
Key Strengths		German parental reform introduced many policies at once so simply using the policy as the shock will not distinguish the effects of the replacement rate and daddy quota. The identification strategy here thus can support understand the actual effect of daddy quota. they also consider both short-term and long-term effect (up to 6 years of birth).
Key Limitations		because they use a did-like design and thus the treatment and control groups are not randomly assigned in a traditional did setting. The design still relies on the assumption that, without the reform-induced leave-taking, the two groups of fathers would have had similar changes over time between first and later births. If fathers who later took leave were becoming more family-oriented over time, changing jobs, or responding to a partner's dissatisfaction, then the estimate may still be biased.
Publication Status		Peer-reviewed
Link		https://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/pii/S0927537119300405?via%3Dihub#sec0001

STUDY 15		Patnaik, A. (2019) — Reserving time for daddy: The consequences of fathers' quotas.
Journal		Journal of Labor economics
Broad theme		Both
Sub-theme(s)		Father involvement/caregiving; Division of household labour/leave
Country Studied		Canada (Quebec vs. rest of Canada)
Time Period Studied		Short-run leave behavior at the point the policy was introduced: 2002–2010. Longer-term household outcomes: 2005 and 2010, focusing on effects 1–3 years after leave period ended
Data		the short-run effects uses benefit claims from the 2002–10 rounds of the Employment Insurance Coverage Survey (EICS); 2002–2010; General Social Survey (GSS) time diary data, 2005 and 2010
Leave Type Studied		Quebec on 1 January 2006 reform: A 5-week nontransferable daddy quota Higher income replacement Lower eligibility criteria
Pay Replacement Rate of Leave Studied		QPIP daddy quota: ~70% of insurable earnings (up to a ceiling), or 75% at lower duration option.
Outcome Variables		Fathers' leave claim rates; fathers' leave duration; mothers' leave participation; joint distribution of parents' leave duration; parents' paid work, full-time employment, workplace time, housework time, childcare time, time at home, and overall household division of labour
Study Design		1. uses EICS benefit-claims data to examine the short-run effect of QPIP on leave-taking. A sharp RD design estimates the immediate effect at the January 2006 reform cutoff, while a DiD design compares Quebec with other Canadian provinces before and after the reform to estimate the average post-reform effect. 2. uses GSS time-diary data to examine longer-term effects on household behaviour 1–3 years after birth. Here, again a DiD design, with difference-in-difference-in-differences (DDD) robustness checks comparing exposed parents of children aged 1–3 with placebo parents of older children aged 5–8
Key Findings		1. QPIP increased fathers' claim rates by 53 percentage points from the prereform participation rate of 21.3% and fathers' leave duration by 3 weeks, representing an increase of 150% from the prereform average of 2.011 weeks. Fathers responded to not only the higher benefits but also the daddy-only label attached to the quota. Tthe average father in postreform Quebec consumed exactly 5 weeks of paid leave but not increase their consumption beyond the amount allocated. 2. Exposed mothers spent more time in paid work and physically at the workplace and were more likely to be full-time employed compared with their counterparts who were not exposed. exposed mothers spend 80 minutes more physically at the workplace (increase of 44% from baseline) and are 5.4 percentage points more likely to be full-time employed (increase of 7% from baseline) compared with mothers who experienced their last birth under the EI program. 3. Exposure to QPIP increased both parents' contributions and exposed fathers increased their time by more than exposed mothers. Specifically, exposed fathers spent more time in housework per day, while exposed mothers decreased their housework and spent more time in childcare instead. Exposed fathers spent more time physically at home while exposed mothers spent less time in the home. Exposed fathers spend 15 minutes longer per day than their counterparts (increase of 21% from baseline). In addition, exposed fathers spend 36 minutes more physically at home.
Key Strengths		multiple quasi experiments cross verifications. for example, using rd and did method used to examine same question and get very similar results for the effects; consider not only unpaid work division, but also paid work of mothers
Key Limitations		again, the reform has many policies happening at once; and for long term impacts only two time points from ggs.such as 2005 and 2010.
Publication Status		Peer-reviewed
Link		https://www.journals.uchicago.edu/doi/full/10.1086/703115#d1e4177

STUDY 16		Ann-Zofie Duvander, Trude Lappegård, Synøve N. Andersen, Ólöf Garðarsdóttir, Gerda Neyer, and Ida Viklund (2019) — Parental leave policies and continued childbearing in Iceland, Norway, and Sweden
Journal	Demographic Research	
Broad theme	Social	
Sub-theme(s)	Fertility	
Country Studied	Iceland, Norway, and Sweden	
Time Period Studied	Iceland: 2001–2009; Norway: 1994–2007; Sweden: 1995–2009	
Data	Administrative register data from national population registers and parental leave records in Iceland, Norway, and Sweden; linked couple-level information on births, parental leave use, education, union status, immigrant background, and parental age	
Leave Type Studied	Father's parental leave use within Nordic parental leave systems. Fathers are grouped into: no leave use, leave use up to the father's quota, and leave use beyond the quota. The quota refers to leave reserved exclusively for fathers	
Pay Replacement Rate of Leave Studied	Nordic parental leave benefits are earnings-related and replace a large share of prior income, around 70–100% depending on country and period. The study focuses on leave use categories rather than estimating effects by replacement rate	
Outcome Variables	Continued childbearing; transition to second birth among one-child couples and transition to third birth among two-child couples	
Study Design	Event history analysis following couples from the end of parental leave use for their first or second child until a subsequent birth, separation, emigration, death, or end of observation	
Key Findings	Fathers' leave use is positively associated with second births in all three countries. Compared with fathers who take no leave, fathers who use leave up to the quota or beyond the quota have higher second-birth risks. The pattern differs by country: in Iceland, second-birth risk is highest when fathers take more than the quota; in Norway, it is highest when fathers take up to the quota; in Sweden, the key distinction is whether fathers take any leave. For third births, the association is weaker and often negative: in Norway and Sweden, fathers' leave use is associated with lower third-birth risks, especially when fathers use leave up to the quota. The authors argue that the two-child norm is linked to the norm of engaged fatherhood, while having a third child may reflect a more selective family orientation	
Key Strengths	Strong administrative register data; compares three Nordic countries with similar but not identical father quota systems; distinguishes no leave, quota use, and more-than-quota use; separates second- and third-birth transitions; useful for showing that gender equality–fertility links differ by parity and national policy context	
Key Limitations	Mainly associational rather than causal; selection into fathers' leave use remains important; does not fully observe workplace constraints or couple-level attitudes; fathers' leave beyond 18 months may be missed, especially in Sweden; results may not generalise beyond Nordic welfare states; third-birth findings are sensitive to how leave use is measured	
Publication Status	Peer-reviewed	
Link	https://doi.org/10.4054/DemRes.2019.40.51	

STUDY 17		Richard J. Petts, Daniel L. Carlson, and Chris Knoester (2020) — If I [Take] Leave, Will You Stay? Paternity Leave and Relationship Stability
Journal	Journal of Social Policy	
Broad theme	Social	
Sub-theme(s)	Father's leave uptake; Family/relationship stability	
Country Studied	United States	
Time Period Studied	Children born in 2001; followed from around 9 months after birth to age 5/6, across ECLS-B waves	
Data	Early Childhood Longitudinal Study–Birth Cohort (ECLS-B); nationally representative sample of children born in the US in 2001; analytic sample restricted to resident two-parent families where fathers were employed at birth and after birth; around 6,000 couples / 20,550 couple-years	
Leave Type Studied	Paternity leave, defined as fathers taking time off work for the birth of a child; includes paid or unpaid leave, but data do not identify whether leave came from formal policy, FMLA, employer leave, vacation, or sick days	
Pay Replacement Rate of Leave Studied	Not directly measured. The paper studies whether fathers took leave and length of leave, but does not identify pay status or replacement rate. US context lacks national paid paternity leave; FMLA provides unpaid leave for eligible workers	
Outcome Variables	Relationship dissolution / relationship stability; relationships coded as dissolved if mothers reported no longer being married to or cohabiting with the focal child's father	
Study Design	Longitudinal study using life-table estimates and discrete-time logistic event history models; models weighted using inverse probability of treatment weighting (IPTW) to address observed selection into leave-taking; sensitivity checks with alternative propensity-score approaches	
Key Findings	Fathers' paternity leave-taking is associated with lower risk of relationship dissolution. Short leaves, especially one week or less and two weeks, are linked to greater relationship stability. The association is not linear: longer leave is not necessarily more protective. Taking leave reduced the predicted probability of dissolution in a wave from about 0.075 to 0.056	
Key Strengths	Uses nationally representative longitudinal birth cohort data; focuses on the US, where national paid paternity leave is absent; distinguishes leave-taking from leave length; applies event-history models; attempts to address selection using IPTW and robustness checks	
Key Limitations	Observational design cannot fully rule out unobserved selection; no information on whether leave was paid, unpaid, formal paternity leave, FMLA, vacation, or sick leave; leave length measured only in weeks, not days; first wave occurs around 9 months after birth, so very early dissolutions may be missed; mechanisms such as father involvement and relationship quality are not fully explained	
Publication Status	Peer-reviewed	
Link	https://doi.org/10.1017/S0047279419000928	

STUDY 18		Olafsson, A. and Steingrimsdottir, H. (2020) — How Does Daddy at Home Affect Marital Stability?
Journal	The Economic Journal	
Broad theme	Social	
Sub-theme(s)	Father's leave uptake; Family/relationship stability	
Country Studied	Iceland	
Time Period Studied	Parents who had children around the January 2001 reform; followed up to 15 years after the child's birth, using data from 1990–2016	
Data	Icelandic register-based panel data from Statistics Iceland / ICELID, covering the population of Icelandic couples who had children in 2000 and 2001; includes marital/cohabitation status, education, income, children, location, and spouse identifiers	
Leave Type Studied	Earmarked paid paternity leave / fathers' quota. The 2001 reform reserved one month of parental leave exclusively for fathers. The leave was non-transferable, so families lost it if fathers did not use it. Later stages expanded the father quota to two months in 2002 and three months in 2003, but this paper mainly identifies the effect of the first month introduced in January 2001	
Pay Replacement Rate of Leave Studied	Parents active in the labour market were paid 80% of average salary while on leave	
Outcome Variables	Parental separation / marital dissolution. The study treats both married and cohabiting couples as couples, and defines separation as divorce or termination of cohabitation	
Study Design	RD, comparing couples whose child was born just before and just after the January 2001 reform cutoff. Also uses RD-DD with a placebo comparison around January 2000 to address seasonality and birth-timing concerns	
Key Findings	Entitlement to one month of earmarked paternity leave reduced parental separation. RD-DD estimates suggest the reform reduced separation by around 11.6 percentage points five years after birth and 8.9 percentage points fifteen years after birth. The authors state that the five-year separation rate in the control group would have been reduced by around 30% if they had been covered by the reform, and around 20% of separations over 15 years may have been avoided. Effects were strongest among couples where mothers had equal or higher education than fathers	
Key Strengths	Strong causal design using a sharp policy cutoff; population register data rather than survey self-report; long follow-up period up to 15 years; includes cohabiting as well as married couples, which is important in Iceland; tests placebo cutoff and RD-DD models; directly links fathers' leave entitlement to family stability	
Key Limitations	Intention-to-treat design: the authors observe entitlement, not individual fathers' actual leave-taking; mechanisms are inferred rather than directly observed; context-specific to Iceland's high take-up and Nordic family-policy setting; results may not generalise to low-pay or low-take-up systems	
Publication Status	Peer-reviewed	
Link	https://doi.org/10.1093/ej/ueaa009	

STUDY 19		Wray, D. (2020) — Paternity Leave and Fathers' Responsibility: Evidence From a Natural Experiment in Canada
Journal	Journal of Marriage and Family	
Broad theme	Social	
Sub-theme(s)	Father involvement/caregiving	
Country Studied	Canada (Quebec vs. rest of Canada)	
Time Period Studied	Around 2006 introduction of Quebec Parental Insurance Plan (QPIP), which created a non-transferable paternity leave quota	
Data	Canadian survey data (General Social Survey), comparing Quebec fathers to fathers in the rest of Canada	
Leave Type Studied	Daddy quota (non-transferable leave within shared parental leave) – QPIP	
Pay Replacement Rate of Leave Studied	QPIP daddy quota: ~70% of insurable earnings (up to a ceiling), or 75% at lower duration option.	
Outcome Variables	Father involvement, disaggregated into three dimensions: engagement (direct interaction with children), accessibility (time in children's presence), and responsibility (solo parenting time)	
Study Design	Natural experiment / Difference-in-differences	
Key Findings	Reserved paternity leave increased fathers' responsibility (solo parenting time) but had weaker or no effects on engagement and accessibility. Suggests that the causal effect of leave-taking is concentrated in the dimension of father involvement most directly tied to solo caregiving experience, rather than overall time with children.	
Key Strengths	Distinguishes between multiple dimensions of father involvement rather than treating it as a single construct	
Key Limitations	Cannot fully rule out other Quebec-specific confounds (e.g. broader family policy differences)	
Publication Status	Peer-reviewed	
Link	https://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/full/10.1111/jomf.12661	

STUDY 20		Dunatchik, A. & Özcan, B. (2021) — Reducing mommy penalties with daddy quotas.
Journal	Journal of European Social Policy	
Broad theme	Economic	
Sub-theme(s)	Maternal labour force participation/employment	
Country Studied	Canada (Quebec vs. Ontario)	
Time Period Studied	Around introduction of Quebec Parental Insurance Plan (QPIP)	
Data	Labour force survey data	
Leave Type Studied	Daddy quota (non-transferable leave within shared parental leave)	
Pay Replacement Rate of Leave Studied	QPIP daddy quota: ~70% of insurable earnings (up to a ceiling), or 75% at lower duration option.	
Outcome Variables	Mothers' labour force participation; full-time employment; part-time employment; unemployment	
Study Design	Difference-in-differences (DiD); semi-parametric DiD; placebo and sensitivity tests. Ontario used as comparison group.	
Key Findings	Quebec mothers exposed to the daddy quota were ~5pp more likely to participate in the labour force and work full time, ~5pp less likely to work part time, and ~4pp less likely to be unemployed. Effects largest 2–3 years post-reform, then diminished, raising questions about durability.	
Key Strengths	Clear natural experiment with geographic control group; robust to alternative specifications and placebo tests; examines multiple employment outcomes	
Key Limitations	Effects may not be durable long-term; provincial context; survey data (vs. administrative); cannot establish mechanisms definitively	
Publication Status	Peer-reviewed	
Link	https://journals.sagepub.com/doi/abs/10.1177/0958928720963324	

STUDY 21		Mari, G. & Cutuli, G. (2021) — Do Parental Leaves Make the Motherhood Wage Penalty Worse?
Journal	European Sociological Review	
Broad theme	Economic	
Sub-theme(s)	Maternal earnings/wages; Maternal labour force participation/employment	
Country Studied	Germany	
Time Period Studied	Two reform periods: 1985–1998 (centred on 1992 reform extending job guarantee from 18 to 36 months); 1999–2014 (centred on 2007 Elterngeld reform)	
Data	German Socio-Economic Panel (SOEP v31.1, 1984–2014). Samples A–K. Restricted to women aged 16–45, dependent employees, first-time mothers, with at least 2 valid observations. N=706 women (462 treated) for Reform 1; N=1,017 women (494 treated) for Reform 2. Followed for an average of 5.6 and 6.2 waves respectively.	
Leave Type Studied	Parental leave reform with daddy quota component – the 2007 reform included 2 bonus months when each parent takes at least 2 months (Elterngeld daddy months). The 1992 reform had no daddy months.	
Pay Replacement Rate of Leave Studied	Reform 1 (1992): mixed flat-rate and means-tested payments, available regardless of pre-birth employment status; job guarantee extended to 36 months. Reform 2 (2007 Elterngeld): 67% of prior net earnings, min. €300/month, max. €1,800/month for 12 months (or 14 months when each parent takes at least 2 months). Job guarantee period unchanged throughout at 36 months.	
Outcome Variables	Mothers' hourly wages (log real hourly wages, year by year from birth to year 5, event-study framework); mechanisms: share of months on leave, weekly working hours upon re-entry, job tenure with current employer	
Study Design	Difference-in-differences (DiD) with individual fixed effects and entropy balancing; event-study specification estimating motherhood wage penalty year-by-year for up to 5 years post-birth; intention-to-treat. Two separate reform analyses (1992 and 2007), each with own treatment/control group of first-time mothers before and after each reform.	
Key Findings	Motherhood wage penalties are large (up to 20–30% of pre-birth wages) and larger than prior studies suggested, partly because the event-study design disaggregates by year post-birth rather than averaging across all years. Reform 1 (1992): the expanded job guarantee prolonged leave-taking (leave share more than doubled in some years) but also preserved job tenure. These two forces largely cancelled each other out, leaving wage penalties stable and unchanged before and after 1992. Reform 2 (2007): wage penalties for mothers effectively disappeared. Treated women showed no detectable large motherhood wage penalty in any year up to year 5. This improvement is attributed to shorter career interruptions (leave concentrated in first 12 months) and longer working hours upon re-entry. Daddy months are tentatively mentioned as part of the mechanism (freeing time for mothers to work longer hours), but this is descriptive, not causally identified in this study.	
Key Strengths	Disentangles mechanisms (leave duration, working hours, tenure) explicitly; examines two very different reforms, allowing comparison of maternalist vs. gender-equality-oriented policy designs.	
Key Limitations	Relatively small sample sizes (N=700 and ~1,000), acknowledged as potentially underpowered; the daddy months mechanism is not causally identified – it is mentioned as a possible contributor but not tested directly; DiD design with long time windows increases risk of confounding from contemporaneous reforms (e.g. childcare expansion in 1995 and 2005–2008), partly addressed in robustness checks; estimates assume homogeneity within treatment groups (no heterogeneity analysis by education/income); East Germany underrepresented in Reform 1 sample	
Publication Status	Peer-reviewed	
Link	https://academic.oup.com/esr/article/37/3/365/5999095	

STUDY 22Hart, R.K., Andersen, S.N. & Drange, N. (2022) — Effects of extended paternity leave on family dynamics	
Journal	Journal of Marriage and Family
Broad theme	Social
Sub-theme(s)	Division of household labour/leave; Family/relationship stability; Fertility
Country Studied	Norway
Time Period Studied	Extension of the Norwegian father's quota from 6 to 10 weeks; full population of parents with children born in a 4-month window around the reform
Data	Norwegian administrative registers
Leave Type Studied	Daddy quota (non-transferable leave within shared parental leave) – extension of existing quota
Pay Replacement Rate of Leave Studied	Norwegian parental benefit: 100% of prior earnings up to a ceiling (for the standard, shorter-duration option used by most parents during the period studied).
Outcome Variables	Couples' division of parental leave and paid work; union stability; marriage propensity; further childbearing (fertility)
Study Design	Regression discontinuity design (RDD)
Key Findings	Extending the father's quota shifted the division of leave and paid work between parents toward more equal sharing. However, the study found limited evidence that this shift in leave division translated into improved family dynamics: no clear effects on union stability, marriage propensity, or further childbearing were detected from the quota extension alone.
Key Strengths	Tests downstream relationship/fertility outcomes rarely covered in the literature, addressing whether leave-sharing effects 'spill over' into family stability
Key Limitations	Marginal extension to an already-existing quota (6 to 10 weeks) may understate effects of introducing a quota from zero; null results on relationship outcomes leave open whether a longer follow-up would reveal effects
Publication Status	Peer-reviewed
Link	https://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/full/10.1111/jomf.12818

STUDY 23Korsgren, P. & van Lent, M. (2022) — Earmarked Paternity Leave and Well-Being	
Journal	IZA Discussion Paper No. 15022
Broad theme	Social
Sub-theme(s)	Parental wellbeing
Country Studied	Multiple European countries
Time Period Studied	Policy reforms between 1993 and 2007
Data	European Social Survey (ESS) linked to cross-country variation in the timing of earmarked paternity leave reforms across European countries
Leave Type Studied	Daddy quota (non-transferable paternity leave within shared parental leave)
Pay Replacement Rate of Leave Studied	Varies across countries and reforms
Outcome Variables	Life satisfaction; job satisfaction; work–life balance
Study Design	Difference-in-differences exploiting staggered introduction of earmarked paternity leave quotas across European countries; event-study analyses
Key Findings	Introduction of earmarked paternity leave increased life satisfaction by around 0.18 points on a 10-point scale (roughly a 10.8 percentage-point improvement). Both mothers and fathers benefited, although gains were about 30% larger for mothers. Little or no effect was found on job satisfaction or work–life balance, suggesting that wellbeing gains arise through broader family or life satisfaction rather than workplace outcomes.
Key Strengths	Exploits multiple policy reforms across countries; examines long-term wellbeing effects extending many years after reform; includes event-study analyses to assess dynamic effects
Key Limitations	Cross-country design coincides with other family policy changes, making causal attribution more challenging; subjective wellbeing measures rely on survey responses; cannot identify the mechanisms driving increased life satisfaction
Publication Status	Working paper (not yet peer-reviewed)
Link	https://docs.iza.org/dp15022.pdf

STUDY 24		Frodermann, C., Wrohlich, K. & Zucco, A. (2023) — Parental Leave Policy and Long-run Earnings of Mothers.
Journal	Labour Economics	
Broad theme	Economic	
Sub-theme(s)	Maternal earnings/wages; Maternal labour force participation/employment	
Country Studied	Germany	
Time Period Studied	Around 2007 German parental leave reform; long-run earnings outcomes	
Data	Administrative social security data	
Leave Type Studied	Parental leave reform including daddy quota component (non-transferable leave within shared parental leave) – 2 months	
Pay Replacement Rate of Leave Studied	Elterngeld (2007 reform): 67% of prior net earnings (65% for higher earners), min. €300/month, max. €1,800/month. Daddy months at same earnings-related rate — key driver of higher-earner take-up.	
Outcome Variables	Long-run earnings of mothers; employment interruption duration; working hours; employer stability	
Study Design	Difference-in-differences (DiD) comparing mothers giving birth just before vs. after the 2007 reform, netting out seasonal effects	
Key Findings	Average duration of employment interruptions increased for high pre-birth earnings mothers, but positive long-run earnings effect found for this group. Effect not explained by changes in selection, working hours, or employer stability. Descriptive evidence suggests stronger father involvement (daddy months) facilitated mothers' re-entry and increased earnings. Low pre-birth earnings mothers: no beneficial long-run effect from the reform.	
Key Strengths	Long-run perspective (rare in the literature); examines multiple potential mechanisms; confirms heterogeneity by income	
Key Limitations	Reform is a policy bundle, namely, hard to isolate daddy months effect; low-income mothers do not benefit; descriptive evidence for mechanism (father involvement) rather than causal	
Publication Status	Peer-reviewed	
Link	https://doi.org/10.1016/j.labeco.2022.102296	

STUDY 25		Daniel Avdic, Arizo Karimi, Anna Sjögren, and Elin Sundberg (2023) — Paternity leave and child outcomes
Journal	IFAU Working Paper 2023:25	
Broad theme	Social	
Sub-theme(s)	Child outcomes	
Country Studied	Sweden	
Time Period Studied	Reform applied to children born on or after 1 January 1995; analysis uses Swedish children born 1991–1995 and follows them to compulsory school-leaving outcomes in grade 9	
Data	Linked Swedish administrative registers covering children and biological parents; parental leave spell data from the Swedish Social Insurance Agency; education and tax register data; children's grade 9 school outcomes from the Swedish National Agency for Education; supplementary military enlistment and health register data	
Leave Type Studied	Earmarked paid paternity/parental leave quota. The 1995 Swedish reform reserved one month / 30 days of paid parental leave for each parent; these days became non-transferable, so families had to either have the father use the month or forfeit it	
Pay Replacement Rate of Leave Studied	Wage-replaced parental leave days; the paper focuses on the quota and take-up rather than estimating effects by replacement rate. The reform kept total leave duration unchanged and changed the allocation rule, not overall entitlement	
Outcome Variables	Children's compulsory school-leaving GPA; subject-specific grades; intergenerational correlation between fathers' cognitive skills and children's GPA; mechanisms including parental separation, child mental health, subsequent fertility, and role-model effects	
Study Design	Quasi-experimental difference-in-discontinuities / RD-DD design exploiting the January 1, 1995 reform cutoff and plausibly random timing of childbirth around the cutoff	
Key Findings	The reform increased fathers' leave uptake and shifted some leave from mothers to fathers. Overall GPA fell slightly by about 0.03 standard deviations, but this was driven by sons of non-college-educated fathers, whose GPA declined by 0.07 standard deviations. No important effects were found for girls or children of college-educated fathers. The reform increased the link between fathers' cognitive skills and sons' GPA by 0.07 SD, equivalent to about a 30% increase in intergenerational persistence. The authors suggest this may reflect asymmetric effects of parents' time investments, family disruption, and limited substitutability between mothers' and fathers' time in lower-SES families	
Key Strengths	Strong administrative data; causal design based on reform cutoff; long-run child outcome data; separates effects by child sex and parental education; directly examines inequality and intergenerational transmission; shows father quota effects are not automatically equalising	
Key Limitations	Working paper, not fully peer-reviewed journal article; context-specific to Sweden's 1995 reform; mechanisms are suggestive rather than fully proven; findings do not mean fathers' leave is generally harmful, but that this specific quota reform may have had uneven effects across family types; may not generalise to reforms with different design, duration, pay, or support	
Publication Status	Working paper (not yet peer-reviewed)	
Link	https://www.ifau.se/en/Research/Publications/Working-papers/2023/paternity-leave-and-child-outcomes/	

STUDY 26		Camila Regueiro-Ons, Jaime Pinilla, and Beatriz González López-Valcárcel (2024) — More father leave, more babies? Father-exclusive parental leave periods and fertility
Journal		Research Square Working Paper
Broad theme		Social
Sub-theme(s)		Fertility
Country Studied		Spain
Time Period Studied		Spanish father-exclusive leave reforms from 2007 to 2019; analyses the introduction of 2 weeks in 2007 and extensions up to 8 weeks in 2019
Data		Spanish national birth certificate / birth records data; fertility measured as birth counts per 1,000 women of childbearing age, disaggregated by birth order
Leave Type Studied		Father-exclusive parental leave / paid paternity leave. Spain moved from 2 days of leave to 2 weeks in 2007, then later extensions including 4, 5, and 8 weeks. The paper analyses these interventions separately
Pay Replacement Rate of Leave Studied		Fathers receive 100% replacement benefit based on Social Security contributions. Employers continue paying Social Security contributions during fathers' leave
Outcome Variables		Fertility rate / birth count per 1,000 women of childbearing age; birth order-specific outcomes: first births, second births, third births, fourth and higher-order births
Study Design		Bayesian structural time series analysis. The authors construct a counterfactual time trend to estimate the causal impact of each father-exclusive leave reform over time
Key Findings		Overall, father-exclusive parental leave does not clearly affect the fertility rate of women of childbearing age. However, effects differ by birth order. First- and second-order births show no meaningful response to any leave entitlement. By contrast, the 4-week extension is associated with a sustained positive effect on third and higher-order births: third-order births increased by around 0.8%, and fourth/higher-order births by around 1.1% on average. This amounted to roughly 18 additional third births, 5.9 additional fourth births, and 2.4 additional higher-order births per month, or 472 additional births over the 20-month post-period. The 2-week, 5-week, and 8-week reforms did not show comparable effects
Key Strengths		Uses national birth records; examines fertility by birth order rather than only total fertility; evaluates several policy changes rather than a single reform; useful for understanding whether fathers' leave affects fertility differently by parity; applies Bayesian structural time series to build policy counterfactuals
Key Limitations		Preprint, not peer reviewed; does not observe actual fathers' leave take-up, so estimates are intention-to-treat; mechanisms are inferred rather than directly observed; results may depend on Spanish institutional context; cannot evaluate later 16-week equalised leave due to data limits; fertility rates are measured using all women of childbearing age rather than parity-specific female populations, likely making estimates conservative
Publication Status		Working paper (not yet peer-reviewed)
Link		https://doi.org/10.21203/rs.3.rs-4213059/v1

STUDY 27		Brenøe, A.A., Canaan, S., Harmon, N.A. & Royer, H.N. (2024) — Is Parental Leave Costly for Firms and Coworkers?
Journal		Journal of Labor Economics
Broad theme		Economic
Sub-theme(s)		Benefits for employers; Maternal labour force participation/employment
Country Studied		Denmark
Time Period Studied		2001-2013, non-reform setting (stable policy environment throughout)
Data		Full-population administrative linked employer-employee data on the universe of Danish private-sector firms; restricted to small firms (3–30 employees); ~9,941 matched treatment events
Leave Type Studied		Maternity/parental leave generally — not paternity leave specifically. Fathers entitled to 2 weeks post-birth but study focuses on effects of mothers' leave on firms and coworkers
Pay Replacement Rate of Leave Studied		Close to 100% up to a ceiling; firms reimbursed >90% of paid leave wages by parental leave funds, so net employer cost of wage replacement is near zero
Outcome Variables		Firm-level: labour inputs, new hires, turnover, wage bill, sales, profits, firm survival. Coworker-level: hours, earnings, retention, unemployment risk, sick days
Study Design		Dynamic difference-in-differences with matching; event-study design; 2SLS/IV; heterogeneity analysis by firm replacement capacity
Key Findings		Anticipated parental leave imposes negligible costs on firms. Firms compensate by hiring temporary replacements and modestly increasing coworkers' hours; no significant effects on output, profits, or survival. Negative effects found only in the ~10% of firms with no same-occupation coworker available — confirming that advance notice and planning capacity are the critical factors
Key Strengths		Full-population data including VAT sales records enabling direct output measurement; rigorous pre-trend testing; directly addresses the employer-cost objection to leave expansion
Key Limitations		Covers parental & maternity leave, not paternity leave specifically; results depend on leave being anticipated and on Denmark's near-full wage reimbursement system; restricted to small private firms
Publication Status		Peer-reviewed
Link		https://www.journals.uchicago.edu/doi/abs/10.1086/725554

STUDY 28		Petra Persson and Maya Rossin-Slater (2024) — When Dad Can Stay Home: Fathers’ Workplace Flexibility and Maternal Health
Journal		American Economic Journal: Applied Economics
Broad theme		Social
Sub-theme(s)		Father's leave uptake; Maternal health/wellbeing
Country Studied		Sweden
Time Period Studied		Main analysis uses firstborn singleton births from 2008–2012; reform implemented on 1 January 2012; outcomes mainly measured in the first 60, 90, and 180 days after childbirth
Data		Linked Swedish administrative data: birth records, population registers, parental leave claims, inpatient records, specialist outpatient records, and prescription drug records
Leave Type Studied		Paid parental leave used by fathers, especially the 2012 Swedish “Double Days” reform, which allowed parents to take full-time paid parental leave simultaneously for up to 30 additional days during the child's first year; fathers could use these days intermittently while mothers were also on leave
Pay Replacement Rate of Leave Studied		Around 78% of prior gross earnings, up to a ceiling, for wage-replaced parental leave; Sweden also had additional flat-rate leave days. The reform did not change the replacement rate or total leave entitlement
Outcome Variables		Fathers' post-baseline leave use; total number of paternal leave days; maternal postpartum health, including inpatient/specialist outpatient visits for childbirth-related complications, mental health-related visits, anti-anxiety prescriptions, antidepressants, painkillers, and antibiotics
Study Design		RD-DD design. Compares parents of children born just before and after the 1 January 2012 reform, relative to the same birth-month differences in earlier years
Key Findings		The “Double Days” reform increased fathers' use of post-baseline leave by 3.9 percentage points in the first 60 days and 5.9 percentage points in the first 180 days after childbirth. It reduced mothers' childbirth-related inpatient or specialist outpatient visits by 1.5 percentage points, equivalent to a 14% reduction, and reduced antibiotic prescriptions by 1.9 percentage points, equivalent to an 11% reduction. Anti-anxiety prescriptions fell by 0.3 percentage points, around a 26% reduction, though this result was only marginally significant. Effects were stronger for mothers with pre-birth medical histories.
Key Strengths		Strong causal design using policy reform timing; rich administrative data; precise measurement of leave claims and health outcomes; separates physical and mental health outcomes; identifies intra-household spillover effects of fathers' leave flexibility on mothers; shows importance of leave timing, not only leave duration
Key Limitations		the policy combines parental leave with flexibility, so it is specifically about flexible use of leave rather than standard paternity leave duration; working paper version, not peer-reviewed at the time
Publication Status		Peer-reviewed
Link		https://www.aeaweb.org/articles?id=10.1257/app.20220400

STUDY 29		Clifton-Sprigg, J., Fichera, E., Kaya, E. & Jones, M. (2025) — Fathers taking leave: evaluating the impact of shared parental leave in the United Kingdom
Journal		Fiscal Studies
Broad theme		Social
Sub-theme(s)		Father's leave uptake
Country Studied		United Kingdom
Time Period Studied		2010–2019, centred on the April 2015 introduction of UK Shared Parental Leave (SPL); 48-month bandwidth on each side of the reform cutoff (avoiding overlap with the 2011 Additional Paternity Leave reform)
Data		UK Household Longitudinal Study (UKHLS / Understanding Society), nationally representative panel of ~40,000 households surveyed annually since 2009. Sample restricted to married/cohabiting working parents. N=1,397 fathers for uptake analysis; N=1,002 for leave length analysis.
Leave Type Studied		Shared parental leave (transferable SPL is carved out of the mother's maternity entitlement, not a non-transferable daddy quota). Fathers can take up to 50 weeks shared with the mother, but only if the mother curtails her own maternity leave. This is fundamentally different from a daddy quota.
Pay Replacement Rate of Leave Studied		UK Statutory Shared Parental Pay (SShPP): flat rate of £139.58/week in 2015 (rising to £184.03/week by 2024), or 90% of average weekly earnings, whichever is lower, for up to 37 weeks. This flat rate was approximately 52% of weekly earnings for a full-time worker on the national minimum wage — well below earnings-replacement rates in comparable Nordic and Quebec systems. Some employers offer enhanced occupational top-ups to 100%, but only ~17% of UK employers offered such schemes and no comprehensive data exist on their prevalence.
Outcome Variables		Fathers' uptake of leave (binary, yes/no); length of leave taken by fathers (calendar days, conditional on taking leave); same outcomes examined for subgroups (by education, occupation, household income, employer size, within-couple earnings gap)
Study Design		Regression discontinuity in time (RDiT) around the April 2015 SPL policy roll-out, using a 48-month bandwidth, local polynomial approach with triangular kernel and donut around the reform month. Power prediction exercise conducted to determine appropriate bandwidth and assess ability to detect effects of different sizes. OLS and placebo exercises used as robustness checks.
Key Findings		No significant increase in fathers' leave uptake (RDiT estimate: +0.004, SE=0.059) or leave length (–0.788 days, SE=1.597) overall. Findings robust to alternative bandwidths, kernels, and placebo tests. No significant subgroup effects, except a marginally significant (10% level) increase in leave length among couples where both parents are university graduates (+4.6 days, SE=2.4). Power analysis shows the study can rule out effects larger than 11.9 percentage points on uptake and 2.3 days on average leave length. The authors conclude that the absence of three key design features — non-transferability (a daddy quota), adequate financial compensation, and simple/universal eligibility — explains the null result, contrasting with successful reforms in Iceland, Quebec, and Denmark.
Key Strengths		First causal analysis of UK SPL; full paper text is open access; power prediction exercise conducted upfront to assess what effects the study can and cannot detect (transparent about limitations); placebo and robustness checks; directly relevant to UK policy debate and reform discussions; peer-reviewed
Key Limitations		Relatively small sample size (N~1,400 fathers) means the study is underpowered to detect uptake effects smaller than ~12 percentage points — it can rule out large effects but not small-to-moderate ones; relies on survey self-report rather than administrative data; cannot observe the type of leave taken (paternity vs. SPL vs. maternity), so leave length measure includes all types; the absence of a daddy quota makes this study less directly relevant to scoping reviews focused specifically on non-transferable paternity leave, though it provides important comparative context
Publication Status		Peer-reviewed
Link		https://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/10.1111/1475-5890.70000

STUDY 30Cukrowska-Torzewska, E., Matysiak, A., Kasperska, A. & Kaufman, G. (2025) — Employers' Discrimination against Fathers and Mothers Taking Parental Leave: Evidence from a Choice Experiment	
Journal	WNE Working Paper No. 27/2025 (490)
Broad theme	Economic
Sub-theme(s)	Labour market discrimination/bias
Country Studied	Poland
Time Period Studied	NA
Data	Discrete choice (conjoint) experiment data with 997 managers evaluating 7,976 hypothetical job-applicant profiles
Leave Type Studied	Non-transferable parental leave for fathers (9-week EU-mandated quota; tested at 2-month and 6-month durations in the experiment)
Pay Replacement Rate of Leave Studied	Polish maternity/paternity leave: 100% of earnings; parental leave: ~70% of earnings (mean combined rate for mothers ~81.5%; rate for fathers' 9-week non-transferable leave: 70%).
Outcome Variables	Probability of being hired; employer willingness to pay (wage offer); perceived availability, competence, and motivation of applicants
Study Design	Discrete choice / conjoint experiment analysed with conditional logit models and mediation analysis
Key Findings	Fathers taking 2 months of leave faced an 8% hiring/pay penalty, but only marginally significant (p=0.084). Fathers taking 6 months faced a stronger, significant 16% hiring penalty and 15% pay penalty, driven by being seen as less available. Mothers taking a shorter 6-month leave (vs. the 12-month norm) got an 11–12% hiring/ pay premium. At the household level, an equal 6-month/6-month split between parents minimised the couple's combined penalty -- better than the common 12-month/2-month split, since the mother's premium offset the father's loss.
Key Strengths	Experimental design allows clean causal identification of employer discrimination, separate from worker self-selection; large sample of real managers; directly compares parental leave penalties to unemployment penalties to isolate signaling vs. human capital mechanisms; examines underlying psychological mechanisms (availability, competence, motivation) via mediation analysis
Key Limitations	Hypothetical vignette experiment rather than real hiring outcomes, so findings may not fully translate to real-world hiring; captures only short-term/CV-based employer perceptions, not longer-term career trajectories
Publication Status	Working paper (not yet peer-reviewed)
Link	https://www.wne.uw.edu.pl/application/files/5617/6225/0292/WNE_WP490.pdf

STUDY 31Hipp, L. (2025) — Damned if You Do, Damned if You Don't? Experimental Evidence from Germany on Hiring Discrimination Against Mothers with Short Family Leave	
Journal	Work and Occupations
Broad theme	Economic
Sub-theme(s)	Labour market discrimination/bias
Country Studied	Germany
Time Period Studied	NA
Data	Original field experiment (correspondence/audit study, 718 applications to 359 real job ads) + original laboratory experiment (student raters, N=94 fathers' materials, N=128 mothers' materials)
Leave Type Studied	Parental leave (Elternzeit): comparing 2 months (mandatory minimum) vs. 12 months
Pay Replacement Rate of Leave Studied	65% of prior earnings, capped at €1,800/month (German Elterngeld system); contextual detail, not experimentally varied
Outcome Variables	(1) Interview invitation (field experiment); (2) Hiring recommendation (lab experiment); (3) Perceived competence, commitment, parental qualities, warmth, likeability, hostility, interpersonal appeal, communality, agency, dominance (lab experiment)
Study Design	Correspondence/audit field experiment + complementary laboratory (survey) experiment; both 2×2 within-subject factorial design (gender × leave length); McNemar's test + linear probability models with employer fixed effects; mediation analysis in lab study
Key Findings	Mothers taking only 2 months of leave were ~40% less likely to be invited to interview than mothers taking 12 months (a significant, ~8pp gap); fathers' invitation rates were unaffected by leave length. Lab study replicated this and showed the mother penalty was driven by normative discrimination (perceived poor parenting, low warmth/communality), not perceived competence. Long-leave fathers were seen as warmer/better parents but less agentic — effects that cancelled out.
Key Strengths	Real field experiment with actual employers (high external validity); complements with lab experiment to isolate psychological mechanisms; large field sample (718 applications); rigorous causal identification via random assignment; tests multiple competing discrimination theories simultaneously
Key Limitations	Single occupation (event manager), limited generalizability; lab raters are students, not real HR professionals/ employers (though justified by literature on rater agreement); cannot fully disentangle human-capital effects of leave length from discrimination per se; data now ~10 years old, though author cites more recent studies suggesting patterns persist; small East Germany subsample limits regional conclusions
Publication Status	Peer-reviewed
Link	https://doi.org/10.1177/073088884251360325

STUDY 32		Petts, R. J., Mize, T. D., & Kaufman, G. (2025) — Does taking parental leave make you a more likeable worker? Evidence from a survey experiment
Journal	Community, Work & Family	
Broad theme	Economic	
Sub-theme(s)	Labour market discrimination/bias	
Country Studied	United States	
Time Period Studied	NA	
Data	A survey experiment that includes vignettes of workers who consider taking paid parental leave (N = 1,625)	
Leave Type Studied	paid parental leave in general: Weeks of leave taken varies from 0-17 weeks, length of paid parental leave offered ranged from 0 to 12 weeks, and all workers had the option to take up to 5 additional weeks of paid time off, resulting in a maximum leave taken of 17 weeks	
Pay Replacement Rate of Leave Studied	wage replacement while on parental leave (55–100% of salary; paid time off is stated as being paid at 100%)	
Outcome Variables	likeability of worker	
Study Design	They mainly use factorial survey and focus on manipulating worker's gender and weeks of paid parental leave taken. additionally, they consider wage replacement, whether leave-taking is common within the company (over 80% of workers take leave vs. under 30% of workers),whether the company is supportive of leave-taking, whether the policy is a 'parental' leave policy or a gender-typed ('maternity' or 'paternity') policy, and whether the leave policy is a state or company policy	
Key Findings	fathers are seen as most likeable when they take moderate amounts of leave and are penalized at long lengths of leave--fathers are viewed as most likeable when they take 70% of the leave offered to them (i.e., more than 10 weeks of leave or 70% of leave offered)	
Key Strengths	experimental design and causal identification on the impact of leave up take for one's likeability under different policy design	
Key Limitations	because they focuse on general perceptions of worker likeability, it is unclear how managers would have similar reactions, which is especially important for career outcomes. and they only focus on professional workplace context and do not necessarily consider how men's leave up take shapes their partner's career but more on themselves	
Publication Status	Peer-reviewed	
Link	https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/full/10.1080/13668803.2024.2321124#d1e2997	

STUDY 33		Kleven, H., Landais, C., Lassen, A.S.S., Rosenbaum, P., Steingrimsdottir, H. & Søgaaard, J.E. (2026) — Expanding Paternity Leave: Effects on Beliefs, Norms, and Gender Gaps
Journal	NBER Working Paper No. w34862	
Broad theme	Both	
Sub-theme(s)	Gender norms and beliefs; Maternal earnings/wages; Household income/gender wage gap	
Country Studied	Denmark	
Time Period Studied	Around 2022 Danish reform expanding earmarked paternity leave from 2 to 11 weeks	
Data	New survey data (~40,000 parents) linked to administrative records from Statistics Denmark	
Leave Type Studied	Daddy quota (non-transferable leave within shared parental leave) – expansion from 2 to 11 weeks	
Pay Replacement Rate of Leave Studied	~100% of prior earnings up to a ceiling (Danish parental leave benefit). Reform expanded earmarked leave from 2 to 11 weeks at this rate.	
Outcome Variables	Gendered beliefs and norms; support for paternity leave; perceived childcare ability gap; gender gaps in earnings and hours worked; leave satisfaction	
Study Design	Regression discontinuity design (RDD) combined with linked survey and administrative data; mediation analysis	
Key Findings	Reform made parents more supportive of paternity leave and shifted gender-role beliefs in progressive direction. Perceived childcare ability gap between mothers and fathers narrowed. Earnings gender gap fell by 34pp in year 1 (during leave) and 2.8pp in year 2 (post-leave). Hours gap fell by 33pp and 1.4pp respectively. Mediation analysis shows >50% of year-2 effects explained by changed beliefs. However, leave satisfaction fell sharply - both mothers and fathers wanted more freedom in how the leave was allocated. Effects concentrated among first-time parents.	
Key Strengths	First study to directly measure belief/norm change and mediation; examines mechanisms rigorously	
Key Limitations	Fathers already took 12% of leave pre-reform; earmarking reduced leave satisfaction; cannot fully separate norm change from mechanical reallocation effects	
Publication Status	Working paper (not yet peer-reviewed)	
Link	https://www.nber.org/papers/w34862	

APPENDIX 3: DESIGNING LEAVE THAT WORKS

Paternity leave has the effects that are desired only if there is substantial take-up. The evidence indicates that extending and properly remunerating paternity or parental leave for fathers, and creating an earmarked period of leave just for fathers, could substantially increase fathers’ take-up of leave. Fathers reliably take the leave reserved exclusively for them, and cultural norms shift as uptake becomes more widespread. Enhancing payment levels would not only boost uptake but also ensure that participation is more evenly distributed across income groups, enabling a broader share of fathers to benefit from leave and reducing class-based disparities in early caregiving involvement. Yet again, caution is needed to ensure that cultural shift coincides with policy introduction to ensure that fathers taking up leave becomes visible and normalised in the broader society.

Paternity Leave Pay

The evidence shows that sufficient payment is crucial for paternity leave take-up. Fathers remain the primary breadwinner in the majority of heterosexual coupled families, making the pay level a critical determinant of paternity leave take-up. Several studies show that fathers in the UK did not or would not take up leave because of the insufficient pay (Working Families, 2024; Parental Rights Survey, TUC, 2023).¹⁸⁵

Paternity leave take-up in the UK is currently dependent on household income. Only 12-14% of fathers with a household income of £20-25,000 had access to, and had taken, their full entitlement of employer-enhanced parental leave, compared to 51% of men with a household income above £200,000.¹⁸⁶ Insufficient wage replacement, therefore, entrenches both gendered and class divisions of caregiving by limiting genuine access to paternity leave for lower-income-earning families/fathers. This thus has consequences on the impact of fathers’ involvement in childcare, which increases the social inequalities among children’s outcomes (Chung, 2021).

Evidence shows that when leave for fathers is both substantial and properly remunerated, uptake increases significantly.¹⁸⁷

Use it or lose it: solo paternity leave

The introduction of well-paid, father-specific leave could significantly increase fathers’ participation in parental leave, which could, in turn, alleviate the professional penalties associated with leave use. Evidence from OECD countries demonstrates that fathers generally take the length of leave that is reserved exclusively for them, rather than sharing more equally the portion of leave available to both parents when parental leave is left as “gender-neutral”.

185 <https://workingfamilies.org.uk/news-events/news/poll-results-views-on-parental-leave-in-areas-with-marginal-seats/>
186 Centre for Progressive Policy et al. *Leave in the lurch*. L. Woodruff, *Improving statutory paternity leave would benefit families and the economy*.
187 Eg Lott and Klenner, *Ideal workers and ideal parents*, Working paper.

Even in countries with high levels of gender equality, where most fathers take paternity or parental leave, such as Iceland, Norway and Sweden, fathers account for only around 20-30% of total leave days taken.¹⁸⁸ This illustrates the influence of non-transferable quotas, as fathers tend to take only the leave specifically allocated to them.¹⁸⁹ For example:

- In Norway, 90% of fathers took parental leave in 2022, but 70% took exactly the length of the paternal quota (OECD, 2023).
- In Germany, fathers represented 26% of all leave-takers in 2024, and those who took leave did so for an average of nearly four months (Statistisches Bundesamt, 2025). While the father-specific entitlement amounts to two months, legislation provides for an additional two “partner bonus” months when both parents each take at least two months of leave.¹⁹⁰

These patterns highlight the importance of individualised entitlements. Fathers’ uptake is consistently lower in countries where parental leave can be transferred between parents (Birkett and Forbes, 2019; Duvander and Ruspini, 2021; Twamley and Schober, 2019).

Findings reinforce the importance of earmarked paternity leave. With the introduction of earmarked leave, uptake grew from 3-60% in Norway in two years (Rege and Solli, 2013), to a 50% (15 days) increase in the length of leave taken by fathers on average in Sweden (Eckberg et al, 2013), an 82.4% take-up rate in Iceland in the first year.¹⁹¹ In Poland fathers take up of parental leave rose from 1% to 24% over a decade in Poland (Share the Care and ZUS, 2024).¹⁹²

Farré et al (2025) show that although take-up of leave in Spain has increased markedly (the share of fathers taking leave increased by around 20 percentage points between 2016 and 2023), there is significant heterogeneity in the uptake of leaves, with high-income fathers (and those in certain sectors).

An increase in take-up is important, but it seems that the length of time that fathers do solo care also impacts whether leave leads to enhanced father engagement with the child after leave ends. This is the key to produces the caring effects that are fundamental to the economic, social and equality impacts described above. Certain studies suggest that one or two months of solo care seem to make a significant shift (Bünning, 2015).¹⁹³

188 OECD, *Paid leave for fathers*.
189 Lott and Klenner, *Ideal workers and ideal parents*, Working paper.
190 OECD, *Paid leave for fathers*.
191 Olafsson and Steingrimsdóttir, *How does daddy at home affect marital stability?*
192 Patnaik, *Reserving time for daddy*.
193 O'Brien and Wall (eds), *Fathers on leave alone*. Reimer and Pfau-Effinger, *Different types of parental leave use by German fathers*. Romero-Balsas, et al, *Policemen on Leave Alone in Spain*. Huerta et al., *Fathers’ leave and fathers’ involvement*.

Different studies point to different lengths being key. Nepomnyaschy and Waldfogel (2007) found that the effect only kicks in when fathers take two or more weeks' leave,¹⁹⁴ while others suggest one month alone¹⁹⁵ and two months¹⁹⁶ being the important factors.

Overall, international evidence confirms that properly paid parental leave, especially when combined with “use-it-or-lose-it” entitlements for fathers, promotes higher take-up among men, equalises caregiving responsibilities, and supports more balanced labour market outcomes, which can increase productivity and economic growth for the country. These positive effects are especially evident when leave is of an appropriate duration and taken by fathers independently, rather than concurrently with their partners.

Stigma and culture

For many fathers, the potential career implications associated with taking leave is a genuine concern. Evidence from the CPP et al shows that fathers actively consider how taking leave may affect their professional standing.¹⁹⁷ According to Working Families (2025), among the fathers who felt unable to take their full entitlement, 32% were worried it would harm their career progression, and 26% feared it would make them appear less committed to their job (Working Families, 2025). Furthermore, research by the Equal Parenting Project showed that 39% of future fathers believed taking longer leave would result in decreased responsibility at work, and 37% feared termination if the organisation downsized (Forbes and Birkett, 2025).

When fathers take leave, the cross-national evidence on wage effects is mixed.

In countries with more traditional gender norms and larger imbalance of household and childcare division, career penalties associated with taking parental leave are more substantial. Causal evidence from Poland shows that fathers who take parental leave face professional penalties in hiring and pay.¹⁹⁸ Despite Poland's relatively generous leave system, leave taking by fathers is still culturally non-normative. As a result, employers often view these fathers as less available, motivated and competent than fathers who do not. A similar pattern is evident in South Korea. Although parents are each entitled to up to one year of generously paid leave, fathers' uptake has remained low relative to women. Research shows that long-hours cultures and expectations of the “ideal worker” create strong fears of career penalties among men, discouraging leave taking, despite generous entitlements (Kim, 2023; Oh and Mun, 2022). Evidence shows that for fathers working in organisations with strong ideal-worker norms, leave can be especially penalised.¹⁹⁹

Observational studies from Finland, Norway and Sweden have also documented wage penalties for fathers who take parental leave (Albrecht et al, 2015;

194 Nepomnyaschy and Waldfogel, Paternity leave and fathers' involvement with their young children.

195 Romero-Balsas, et al. Policemen on Leave Alone in Spain.

196 Reimer and Pfau-Effinger, Different types of parental leave use by German fathers.

197 Centre for Progressive Policy et al. *Leave in the lurch*, p.17.

198 E. Cukrowska-Torzewska et al. *Employers' discrimination against fathers and mothers taking parental leave*, working paper.

199 Kasperska et al., *Career Penalties for Flexible Working*, working paper.

Evertsson, 2016; Morosow and Cooke, 2022; Rege and Solli, 2013). Other studies found no negative effects or even positive outcomes linked to greater family involvement. Registry-based studies consistently show that wage penalties for taking parental leave are generally small and do not increase substantially with longer leave, at least for men (Evertsson 2016; Diallo et al, 2025).²⁰⁰ In the medium to long run (two to ten years after the birth) the impact on earnings may be minimal (Diallo et al, 2025). Importantly, the potential negative impact appears to be strongest among higher-educated fathers. For these men, even short periods of leave can trigger employer concerns about commitment (Petts et al, 2022). In the UK, Kelland et al (2022) show in a qualitative study that caregiving fathers are often mocked, suspected of low commitment, or accused of using care responsibilities to evade work by colleagues. However, research shows that these penalties can potentially be removed when many fathers take up leave, which normalises the policy and removes any biases and stigma against certain groups of workers (Chung and Wang, 2025).²⁰¹

In some cases, fathers may also experience positive reactions. Recent experimental evidence in the US shows that leave taking can also generate positive evaluations. In particular, fathers who take paid parental leave are perceived as more likeable by the wider society, although this benefit is largely limited to moderate leave durations (up to ten weeks) rather than longer ones (Petts et al, 2024).

These cases show that policy expansion must be accompanied by cultural and organisational change if fathers are to make full use of parental leave entitlements. Germany provides a useful example of how norms can be shifted. Paternal leave uptake among German fathers (two exclusive months)²⁰² has increased substantially, particularly among those in higher-status occupations, and is no longer regarded as a deviation from normative behaviour that carries professional penalties.²⁰³ In a causal hiring experiment by Hipp (2025), which is comparable to the presented Polish study,²⁰⁴ no hiring penalties were observed for fathers who had taken either two or twelve months of parental leave. The author, Hipp (2025), concludes that the absence of penalties reflects shifting social norms, increased prevalence of paternal leave taking, and correspondingly altered employer perceptions. This aligns with other evidence that non-transferable leave entitlements reduce stigma by making paternity leave taking visible, normalised and expected behaviour (Mitchell, 2023).

Based on the presented international research, the labour market consequences of paternity and parental leave for fathers appear to depend largely on two factors: (1) whether leave taking is common and socially expected, and (2) whether the leave is sufficiently paid to ensure broad, socially diverse uptake. When these conditions are met, the evidence suggests that extended and well-paid leave is unlikely to harm fathers' employment prospects and may, in some cases, produce neutral or moderately positive outcomes (Hipp, 2025; Huebener et al, 2024).

200 For women, wage penalties increase roughly linearly with leave duration, but overall effects are modest (–0.6%).

201 Kasperska et al. Managerial (dis)preferences towards employees working from home.

202 Paid at a level of 65% of the preceding year's net earnings, with a minimum of €300 per month and a maximum of €1,800 per month (Dobrotic et al., 2025).

203 Lott and Klenner, *Ideal workers and ideal parents*, working paper.

204 E. Cukrowska-Torzewska et al., *Employers' discrimination against fathers and mothers taking parental leave*, working paper.

ECONOMIC AND SOCIAL BENEFITS OF ENHANCED PATERNITY LEAVE

Scoping Review

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