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## PARENTAL LEAVE AND PARENTING BENEFITS: Potential Effects on Father Participation in Germany

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In Germany declining birth rates and demographic change led to a new law in 2007, the "Parenting Benefits and Parental Leave Law" (*Bundeselterngeld- und Elternzeit-Gesetz*). This change in family policy had mainly two aims: (1) to reduce parents' financial loss in the first year after childbirth, and (2) to encourage fathers to actively participate in childcare by taking parental leave. We analysed the perception of the new law, and its potential to facilitate fathers' participation, on the basis of 1200 German-wide CATI-interviews of women and men aged 18 to 60. The law's impact was mainly perceived positively with men reporting high motivation to take leave, but so far this has not manifested itself in official statistics. We conclude that financial benefits and more flexible regulations regarding parental leave, on their own, can have only a limited effect on men's participation in childcare. These are only a couple of factors among numerous variables affecting these decisions.

### "ELTERNGELD- UND ELTERNZEIT-GESETZ" IN GERMANY: WHAT IS NEW?

A new law in response to declining birth rates and demographic change, the "Parenting Benefits and Parental Leave Law" (*Bundeselterngeld- und Elternzeit-Gesetz*) was introduced in 2007. With this shift in paradigm (Staats, 2008; Henninger *et al.*, 2008) a better work-life balance and less support for the male breadwinner model was targeted. This was part of a so-called "sustainable family policy" promoted by German unification and European integration (Leitner, Ostner and Schmitt, 2008). The underlying objective was to raise birth rates by providing financial incentives. As it was aimed especially at highly qualified women, it created new inequalities between families (Henninger *et al.*, 2008).

Former regulations to deal with the problem date back to 1986 (in Western Germany). For a maximum of two years after the birth of a child one parent (in 2006, 97% of mothers) could take childcare leave. There was an allowance of max. 300 Euros per month for both years, or 450 Euros per month for one year. In the third year after birth some federal states provided additional, reduced benefits (*Landeserziehungsgeld*). The payments depended neither on parents' previous occupation nor their income before birth. Instead, the benefits were income-tested.

Summarising, the Parenting Benefits and Parental Leave Law consists of changes regarding two aspects: (1) introduction of the Parenting Benefits (*Elterngeld*), a considerably increased financial inducement to having children and taking care of them at home, and (2), the Parental Leave (*Elternzeit*), which gives both parents more flexibility in taking leave and a legal job-guarantee of either the previous position or an equal one within a company. Both aspects are closely intertwined but on principal independent: one can draw parenting benefits while working (up to 30 hours per week with the actual income deducted from eligible parenting benefits) or while on parental leave.

Financial compensation for taking a leave is now only available for the first 12 months after birth. If the second parent takes a leave for at least two months (at the same time as the other parent or separately) the parenting benefits can be obtained for two additional months, in sum up to 14 months. After that period, one can still take parental leave – altogether for up to 3 years, not necessarily in a row – without financial benefits,<sup>1</sup> but with a job guaranteed by the former employer. With the reform in 2007, the character of parental benefits in Germany shifted from a transfer payment to an income replacement (Pull and Vogt, 2010).

The new law, modelled on the example of Nordic countries and the “dual-earner household model” (Spiess and Wrohlich, 2008: 577), has mainly two aims: (1) to reduce financial loss in the first year after birth and therefore encourage people (particularly those with high incomes) to start a family, and (2), to encourage fathers to actively participate in childcare by taking (paid) parental leave. As a consequence the latter aim results in mothers' earlier return to the job (Spieß and Wrohlich, 2006). Parenting benefits currently guarantee up to 65% (67% until end of 2010) of the former average income for the first 12 or 14 months after birth. The minimum allowance is 300 Euros per month.

In the political arena, fathers' participation in parental leave was controversial. The “paradigm shift” in German family policy was

criticised not only between but also within political parties. Across multiple party lines, family politicians, following the Nordic model, argued for creating a strong incentive structure to motivate fathers to participate in parental leave and prolong the number of months they are required to participate – if they want to profit from (attractive) parenting benefits. This debate reflects cultural demands for an active fatherhood and men's participation in childcare on the one hand, and conservative positions considering mothers as primarily responsible for early childcare on the other.

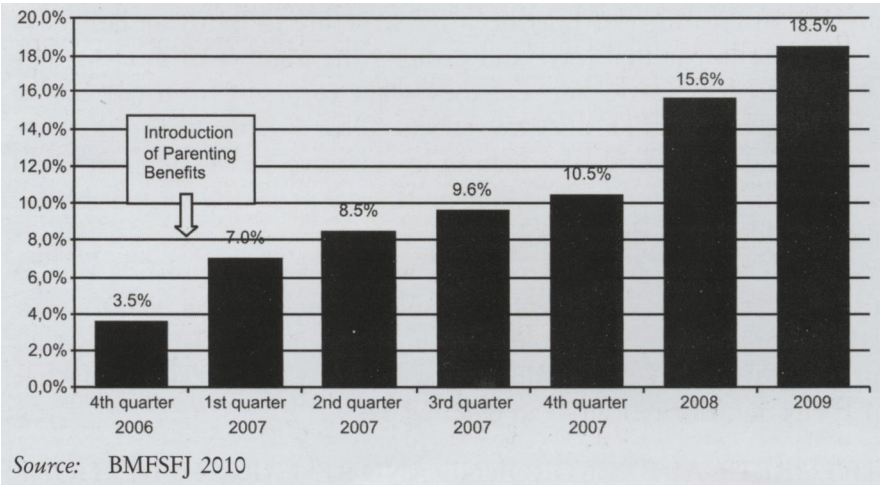
Inevitably the question arises of how the German population assesses this change. Before we present the results of our study on how the new law is perceived by men and women in Germany relative to father participation in early childcare, we briefly contextualise father participation theoretically and empirically.

## **THEORETICAL BACKGROUND AND RESEARCH QUESTIONS**

The new law focuses mainly on – apart from reproductive decisions – more father participation in early childcare. Ten years ago most of German men did not even think about taking parental leave because of traditional norm orientation, gender roles and a strong orientation to prosperity (Vaskovics and Rost, 1999). But, in the last 30 years, general men's participation in childcare and household tasks has increased (Fthenakis, 2002). Now, 20% of – mainly young and well-educated – German fathers can be considered representative of the “new fathers” who differ from the traditional masculine type (Cyprian, 2005). These “new fathers” are present more at home, more (emotionally) engaged in the family and oriented towards egalitarian roles, in contrast to the largely absent and authoritarian breadwinner prevalent in the 1950s (Mühling and Rost, 2007). But these changes in men's attitudes had not yet been translated into action under the parental leave conditions before 2007 (Oberndorfer and Rost, 2005; Kassner and Rüling, 2005). This was mainly due to financial concerns, anxieties regarding careers, and to fears of being stigmatised (Geisler and Kreyenfeld, 2009).

From official statistics we know that the actual participation in parental leave is far behind greater (theoretical) willingness to participate in early childcare. In 2009, 18.5% of fathers had drawn parenting benefits (see Table 1). Nevertheless, compared to the level under the old regulations this is a success, because the share of men taking leave was only 3.5% in 2006.

Table 1  
Father Participation as Share of Approved Applications for Parenting Benefits



Pull and Vogt (2010) found changing patterns in fathers’ use of parental leave after the introduction of the new regulations. Fathers who take a leave do this for a shorter period than mothers (and in general take only the two “partner-months”), usually in addition to the mother’s benefits (BMFSFJ, 2008).<sup>2</sup> This means that they either take a leave when the mother is working reduced hours or is on parental leave herself. Almost two-thirds of fathers take parental leave for only two months while most mothers take a leave for 10 to 12 months (BMFSFJ, 2009). In everyday life raising children is still the mothers’ domain, particularly in the first year after birth. Additionally, we have to keep in mind that over 80% of the fathers do not take any leave.

In the explorative study on the experiences of fathers with the new Parental Leave and Parental Benefit Law by Pfahl and Reuyß (2009), fathers valued highly the flexibility in taking parental leave. The two partner-months represent a socially expected minimal contribution but may involve problems for fathers who wish to go beyond the new standard and take additional months. Regarding the parenting benefits, fathers consider an inducement of 67% (now 65%) of their former income as still too low. Particularly new fathers wish for an extension of the partner-months (BMFSFJ, 2009). Obviously, the potential of active fathers has not yet been met. But what are the inhibitors to fathers’ participation? Or generally, on what does the willingness to take parental leave depend?

As general research on parental leave of fathers is rare in the German context, we depended on findings on the gendered division of household tasks in couples to learn more about men's engagement in childcare. Following Rational Choice approaches and New Home Economics Theory traditional task-sharing within the family is the result of weighing costs and benefits: The father is more likely to continue labour-market participation if he earns more than the mother (Becker, 1993). From an exchange-theory viewpoint, power relations within the family determine the division of household and family tasks. If each partner tries to minimise their own costs and maximise their benefits, the one with greater resources, e.g. in money, education and social capital, will profit most from less involvement in childcare and housework. Lastly, culture-specific gender roles are internalised in the process of socialisation and tend to push partners into a traditional division of tasks, with men being the breadwinners and women housewives (Oberndorfer and Rost, 2005). The Parenting Benefits and Parental Leave regulations of 2007 on the one hand try to reduce (financial) costs for women of having children and consequently strengthen their position when tasks are assigned between family members. On the other hand, in the long run policy-makers are trying to foster change in gender roles stimulated by changes in behaviour of young parents as a response to the new law.

In the study presented here we try to take both economic and "social" factors into account. Our research questions are:

1. How do different social groups in Germany perceive the impact of parenting benefits on men's participation in the upbringing of children?
2. What motivates men/fathers and women/mothers to take parental leave? What role do financial benefits play in the decision to take parental leave? Do social groups differ in their attitudes?

## STUDY DESIGN

Our findings presented in this paper are based on data drawn from a cross-sectional CATI-survey conducted in spring 2008 – one year after introduction of the new law – by the Department of Sociology and Empirical Social Science Research at the Catholic University Eichstaett-Ingolstadt (Germany).

Our target population was men and women aged 18 to 60 resident in Germany with German citizenship. Our sample was based on (resident) registry-office data (registration in Germany is compulsory and therefore

a comparatively up-to-date source of information) which consisted of 7200 addresses. Corresponding telephone numbers to those addresses could be found for around 3400 people. Every person in the sample for whom we had a telephone number received an advance letter describing the intent of the study, sample selection processes, issues regarding confidentiality and a request to participate<sup>3</sup>. During the field phase of four weeks in February/March 2008 we conducted 1200 interviews. Thirty per cent of the people contacted refused participation and 34% completed the questionnaire. For 30% no interview could be completed for various reasons and 3% turned out not to belong to the target group. The response rate was therefore within an expected margin (for more details on sampling procedures see the Appendix).

Due to the construction of the sample and the response rate, the survey is not representative of Germans' overall views on the Parenting Benefits Law or parental leave, but it is suitable for the purpose of comparing social groups in Germany.

A short profile of our respondents shows that 45% (521) were male and 55% (640) female; 17% (189) were under 31 years old, 19% (218) between 31 and 40, 30% (348) between 41 and 50, and 34% (391) were 51 years and older. Compared to the German population aged 18 to 60 years, under-30-year-olds were under-represented (17% compared to 25%) and older respondents over-represented (34% compared to 23%). Related to this "distortion", singles were under-represented in our sample (25% compared to 38%) and married people over-represented (66% compared to 50%). Maybe due to a selection bias, divorced people were also slightly under-represented (5% compared to 10%). Probably they were less motivated to participate in a study on fertility and relationships.

Regarding socio-economic status, it could be expected that groups at the bottom and top end were under-represented, though we did not have data for a direct comparison. More than three-quarters of the respondents had children (72%; 834). Twelve per cent (78) wanted another child, and three-quarters (216) of respondents without children expressed a desire to have one or more.

## **IMPACT OF THE PARENTING BENEFITS LAW ON FATHER PARTICIPATION: GERMANS' PERCEPTION**

In this section we present data on the respondents' perception of the Parenting Benefits and Parental Leave Law and its potential impact on fathers' participation in child raising. After a descriptive analysis we try



to identify those characteristics that best predict the attitude towards the Parenting Benefits Law, whereby we are implying that a positive attitude coincides with a positive effect of the law on fathers' participation in early childcare.

Overall, we found a positive perception of the impact of the law on the motivation of fathers to take parental leave. We asked our respondents whether they perceived a positive, a negative or no effect of the law on fathers' participation. Two-thirds (690) perceived a rather positive effect on fathers' participation; women (63%; 374), men (65%; 316), parents (63%; 494) and people without children (65%; 196) did not differ significantly. Surprisingly, age groups did not differ in their perception either. It could be assumed that older respondents in particular are more traditionally oriented and therefore see a father as breadwinner and not as carer, regardless of legal circumstances or benefits. But that was not the case here.

In regard to income, there was a tendency that higher-income groups (3000 Euro and more: 76%; 81) evaluated the law and its impact more frequently positively ( $r = -.079, p = .012$ ). A separate analysis for income and gender revealed a significant effect of income on the perception in men ( $r = -.126; p = .006$ ) but not in women ( $r = -.017; p = .687$ , see Table 2). Men perceived the impact of the Parenting Benefits and Parental Leave Law on fathers' participation more positively when their monthly income was higher (particularly 3000 Euros or more). We conclude that financial benefits do seem to play a role in fathers' participation (at least in the perception of our respondents). Our findings of a widespread willingness of men to participate in parental leave show that the new Parenting Benefits regulations overall facilitate the actual decision to take leave, especially for well-off men. This is mostly because the financial loss in doing so is reduced. In line with findings of Pull and Vogt (2010), a positive attitude to the new law may result from a maximisation of financial benefits. This means that well-off men interrupt their professional occupation only to take advantage of parental benefit linked to the partner-months, but not for a more intense participation in childcare.

However, whether the woman or man earned more in the relationship did not seem to make a difference in the respondents' judgement. But a more detailed analysis revealed an interesting difference: Men with high incomes whose (female) partners at the same time earned less than they did ( $r = -.171; p = .003$ ) judged more frequently positively the impact of



Table 2  
Men and Women’s Perception of the Impact of the Parenting Benefit Law on Men’s Participation dependent on Respondent Income

Gender			Average monthly income in •						Sum
			< 500	500 to < 1000	1000 to < 2000	2000 to < 3000	3000 to < 4000	4000+	
Men	Impact of the Parenting Benefit law	rather positive	65.6% (21)	51.3% (20)	60.6% (109)	67.2% (86)	78.0% (32)	76.1% (35)	65.0% (303)
	on father participation	No impact	28.1% (9)	35.9% (14)	25.6% (46)	30.5% (39)	9.8% (4)	21.7% (10)	26.2% (122)
		rather negative	6.3% (2)	12.8% (5)	13.9% (25)	2.3% (3)	12.2% (5)	2.2% (1)	8.8% (41)
	Sum		100.0% (32)	100.0% (39)	100.0% (180)	100.0% (128)	100.0% (41)	100.0% (46)	100.0% (466)
Women	Impact of the Parenting Benefit Law	rather positive	59.3% (99)	66.4% (101)	64.0% (114)	57.1% (28)	64.3% (9)	83.3% (5)	62.9% (356)
	on father participation	No impact	26.9% (45)	23.7% (36)	23.6% (42)	26.5% (13)	28.6% (4)	.0% (0)	24.7% (140)
		rather negative	13.8% (23)	9.9% (15)	12.4% (22)	16.3% (8)	7.1% (1)	16.7% (1)	12.4% (70)
	Sum		100.0% (167)	100.0% (152)	100.0% (178)	100.0% (49)	100.0% (14)	100.0% (6)	100.0% (566)

Men: Chi² = 25.813; d.f. = 10; p = .004; Women: Chi² = 5.526; d.f. = 10; p = .853

the Parenting Benefit Law on fathers’ participation. Thus, those male breadwinners with a high incomes judge financial benefits to increase fathers’ participation; this is most likely because, without those benefits, the financial loss to the couple incurred by children is seen to be quite high. Since the standard case in our study is that men have the higher income (66%; 663), or – less frequently – both partners have roughly the same income (25%; 254), the law could have an overall positive effect on men’s participation.

Education and income are correlated ( $r = .291$ ;  $p < .001$ ) and therefore we could find the same tendencies described here for education: the higher the educational level the more frequent was a positive perception of the law’s increasing fathers’ participation, although this correlation was weaker for women.

Beside the socio-economic factors, the impact of attitudes was tested. For responding women a positive perception of the impact on fathers’ participation tended ( $p = .054$ ) to coincide with a high general level of

satisfaction with the relationship. If men expressed a general willingness to take parental leave, they also perceived the impact of the law more frequently positively ( $r = .157$ ;  $p = .001$ ). Most likely they are encouraged by the legislation to put their wishes (or the wishes of their partners) into practice. A change in social climate and role expectation coincides with the law and facilitates men's participation – if there is a general willingness to do so. The new law gives men taking parental leave an institutional frame for combining the attributes of “carer” and “man” with fewer of the disadvantages.

A stepwise regression analysis showed that for men the most important factor in how they perceive the effect of financial benefits on fathers' participation is satisfaction with the relationship (see Table 3). If men were satisfied (in their relationship but also in their jobs ( $\beta = .328$ ;  $p = .001$ )) they perceived the new law more frequently positively ( $\beta = .522$ ;  $p < .001$ ). Ergo, it seems that satisfied men are more likely to take parental leave.

Advocating equal relationships represents modern attitudes, but in our results it does not coincide with a positive perception of the law's potential impact on fathers' participation ( $\beta = -.437$ ,  $p < .001$ ). On the contrary, to those men for whom an equal relationship is less important, the law seems to be most effective. For these men, father participation does not seem to be a sign of an equal relationship. Once again, maximising financial benefits by taking partner-months could be the underlying reason for a positive perception of the law.

On the assumption that, in more rural areas, social control and traditional role models are more prevalent than in urban areas, the impact of size of place of residency on the perception of the law can be explained ( $\beta = -.559$ ;  $p < .001$ ): In more rural areas men perceive a less positive impact of the law on fathers' participation.

Interestingly, economic factors play a role in the prediction of the willingness to take leave, but among these is not the man's own income – only his partner's ( $\beta = -.431$ ,  $p < .001$ ). The higher the partner's income the more frequent is a perceived positive impact of the law on father participation. This is likely to be due to financial considerations: if the man participates in childcare then the woman is the breadwinner, and if she has a high income their financial losses are smaller (particularly if the man's income is lower than the woman's). The higher the men's employment status – or in simpler terms, the more hours they work – the more positive is their perception of the law ( $\beta = .374$ ;  $p < .001$ ).

Other studies (e.g. Kurz, 2005) showed that secure employment (the ideal is a full-time, permanent contract) is often a requirement for starting a family. The new law seems to intensify this relation because it helps to combine a professional career with children and the role of the carer by maintaining the (high) employment status after the (short) time of parental leave.

The main dimensions for predicting the perceived impact of the law on fathers' participation are therefore socio-economic aspects, job- and relationship satisfaction, and (personal) values found in a more urban environment. A higher level of income of the partner, a higher employment status, a lower educational level ( $\beta = .334$ ;  $p = .019$ ), a higher level of satisfaction with the relationship, a more urban place of residency and, surprisingly, a lesser importance of an equal (partner) relationship, increase the probability of a positive perception of the impact of the Parenting Benefit Law on fathers' participation for men. For encouraging fathers' participation this means that some factors influencing it, namely satisfaction and values, cannot be addressed by this law (in the short term), and probably by no law in general.

Assuming that parental leave questions are negotiated between parents on a partnership level, women's attitudes towards an impact of the law on father participation are interesting. For women the judgement seemed not to be tied to the same factors. More satisfied women, like satisfied men, are more likely to perceive a positive impact of the law on father participation ( $\beta = .524$ ;  $p < .001$ ). At the same time the view that family life does not suffer when the mother works full-time represents modern values which tend to increase the probability of a positive perception of the law ( $\beta = -.324$ ;  $p = .021$ ).

The striking difference between men and women is the impact of socio-economic aspects on the judgement of the impact of the Parenting Benefits Law on fathers' participation. Whereas for men those aspects make a difference in the probability of a positive perception of an increased fathers' participation after changes in the legal situation, for women they do not. For men and women a satisfied relationship coincides with a higher probability of a positive judgement. We suppose that in a satisfying relationship the commitment and readiness to make sacrifices is greater and therefore men will not mind taking parental leave not only for their own sake, but also to relieve their (female) partner – if financial aspects are not a (major) issue. This interpretation is supported by findings of Pfahl and Reuyß (2009) indicating that almost half the men taking parental leave

Table 3  
Perceived impact of the Parenting Benefits and Parental Leave Law on Father Participation

	Women <sup>a</sup>	Men <sup>b</sup>
Satisfaction with relationship	.524***	.522***
Ideal point in time for having children	.181	-.049
Satisfaction with job	.016	.328**
Education		.334*
Employment status	-.091	.374***
Size of place of residency		-.559***
Responsibility for making decisions on bigger purchases	.053	-.057
Income of partner		-.431***
Employment status of partner	.132	
Importance of equal relationship		-.437***
Negative impact on family life if woman is working	-.324*	

<sup>a</sup>R<sup>2</sup><sub>corr</sub> = .437; F = 14.180; p < .001

<sup>b</sup>R<sup>2</sup><sub>corr</sub> = .555; F = 10.447; p < .001

do this for one to two months, mostly following the wish of their partners. At the same time, women in a satisfying relationship expect their partner to support them (a standard assumption is still that the woman takes care of the children) and participate in looking after the children. But, it is possible that the men would do that ‘even’ without the new law.

We conclude that formal regulations and financial benefits, in the perception of our interviewees, have the potential to encourage and facilitate father participation. But there are also important aspects like satisfaction with a relationship and attitudes towards gender roles that cannot be manipulated by family policy but make a difference in the perception of the law.

WILLINGNESS AND MOTIVATION TO TAKE PARENTAL LEAVE

In addition to a general judgement on potential influences of the law on father participation, we were interested in the general willingness of our respondents themselves to take parental leave and their underlying motivations for it.

General Willingness

Three-quarters of our respondents expressed a high or very high degree of willingness to take parental leave. Only around 6% of the respondents would not take parental leave. As expected, there was a significant

difference between women and men: While 90% of responding women declared a high or very high degree of willingness, this was only 60% of the men ( $F = 42.25$ ;  $p < .001$ ;  $\eta^2 = .039$ ). Traditional values seem to be prevalent, although the share of men reporting a willingness to take parental leave is nevertheless quite high.

Respondents' income also plays an important role: those with a monthly income of 4000 Euros have the lowest reported willingness to take a leave ( $F = 3.046$ ,  $p = .010$ ;  $\eta^2 = .014$ ). Presumably, the financial losses would be too big for this income group. Higher parenting benefits associated with parental leave do not seem to change this fact. The Parenting Benefits Law aims to enable families to maintain their standard of living even when one parent works reduced hours or takes leave. The problem with this aim is that parenting benefits cannot guarantee the standard of living for high-income families. Altogether women, even those with high income, reported a willingness to take parental leave more frequently than men. This might show how powerful traditional gender roles still are, for both women and men. But it also shows – again – that for men financial or economic aspects play a more powerful role in parental leave decisions than for women. Descriptive statistics show that only for men does income make a difference in the willingness to take leave (men:  $\chi^2 = 36.374$ ; d.f. = 20;  $p = .014$ ;  $\eta = .219$ ; women:  $\chi^2 = 18.211$ ; d.f. = 20;  $p = .574$ ).

In a stepwise regression analysis only three variables improve the prediction of the willingness of men to take parental leave (see Table 4): (1) the higher the income the lower the willingness to take leave ( $\beta = .603$ ;  $p < .001$ ), (2) if men do not expect (or only on a low level) that women will take on household tasks the likelihood of reporting a willingness to take parental leave is increased ( $\beta = -.620$ ;  $p < .001$ ). As could be expected, more “modern” men (with less traditional role expectations) are willing to take parental leave more frequently. At the same time (3), the less important the financial independence from the partner, the more likely a man reports a general willingness to take parental leave (overall:  $\beta = -.368$ ;  $p < .001$ ; men:  $\beta = -.324$ ;  $p = .033$ ). This is in line with findings from Pull and Vogt (2010: 131) of a higher probability of fathers' participation if the man has a lower income, is less educated, works few hours and shows a weaker employer orientation than his partner. At the same time a family orientation, taking on household tasks, modern gender role expectations and few (perceived) career obstacles increase the probability of men's parental leave.

Table 4  
Regression Analyses for Reported Willingness to take parental leave

	<i>Men<sup>a</sup></i>
Income	.603***
Employment status	-.021 <sup>c</sup>
Stability of relationship	-.006
Responsibility for decisions on bigger purchases	.065
Importance of financial independence from partner	-.324*
Agree/Disagree: Woman is responsible for household	-.620***

<sup>a</sup> R<sup>2</sup> = .602; F<sub>3</sub> = 12.085; p < .001

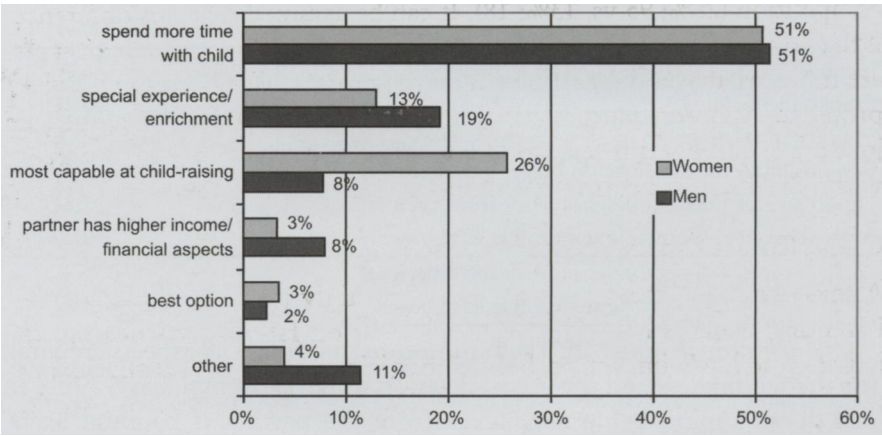
Our findings underline the assumption that financial aspects are vital for the willingness and the actual decision to take parental leave. Only if one doesn't mind being dependent from the partner is parental leave considered. Additionally, "modern" men and "traditional" women are more likely to report a willingness to take parental leave. We conclude that, so far, with the new law little has changed in traditional gender roles.

Motivations for (not) Taking Parental Leave

Most frequently, the reported reasons for taking parental leave have been: to be able to spend more time with the child (51%; 431); because the respondent considered him-/herself to be the one more capable (19%; 163); because childcare and child-raising is considered a special experience and enrichment (15%; 128); and for financial reasons (5%; 42). Some gender differences could be detected: Men respondents less frequently considered themselves to more capable at child-raising (8%; 23) than women (26%; 140)<sup>4</sup>. In addition, men considered parental leave and the relating experiences as an enrichment more frequently than women (19%; 58 vs. 13%; 70). For men, financial reasons were more crucial (8%; 26 vs. 3%; 22), for example: If their partner earned more than they did, they would take parental leave (see Table 5, Pull and Vogt, 2010). This can be interpreted in two ways: Men who cannot live up to the male breadwinner model are more willing to take parental leave (Henninger *et al.*, 2008), and/or men try to maximise financial benefits.

Reasons for *not* taking parental leave were mainly job-related. More than half of the respondents (55%; 138) mentioned perceived problems in resuming their job, 31% (78) financial reasons. Men worried more about their job than women (57%; 109 vs. 47%; 29). Freelancers in

Table 5  
Main Reasons for Taking Parental Leave



particular saw their professional future in danger. Although freelancers and self-employed people were also predominantly willing to take parental leave, in comparison to other occupational groups their share was a bit lower. This occupational group does not profit from the new parental leave regulations equally. Parents did not differ from non-parents in their motives for taking or not taking parental leave.

Almost half of the respondents (48%; 530) perceived problems with resuming their job after taking one year’s parental leave. As found in other studies (e.g. Rost, 2001; Institut für Demoskopie Allensbach, 2010), men perceived problems a bit more frequently than women (54%; 263 vs. 42%; 267). Probably men worry more about job-related effects than women because the male identity is more strongly connected to the role of “breadwinner”. The main worry was losing track of new developments in the job or massive backlogs (50%; 257). Again, men worried about this a bit more frequently than women (56%; 144 vs. 45%; 113). Twenty-two percent (113) considered job competition a difficulty in job re-entry. This illustrates the importance of a secure employment for men in the context of family formation. Additionally, women (14%; 34) considered the dual burden of family and job problematic. Men very rarely shared that worry (3%; 7). This reflects the fact that women feel responsible for household and family affairs, and if they decide to work on top of that responsibility, they need to find a way of combining those tasks. Men are unlikely to face that kind of challenge and therefore it hardly comes to their mind when asked about potential problems with re-entry after a



one-year parental leave. Generally, parents were less worried about losing track than people without kids (45%; 165 vs. 64%; 92) and less about job competition (26%; 95 vs. 13%; 18). It can be assumed that this difference is due to specific experiences parents gained, and, in a sense, their answers are more reliable and realistic because they might have encountered that problem. Another interpretation could be that people for whom their jobs are less important tend to found a family, whereas people occupied with job-related concerns tend to refrain from having a family.

## CONCLUSIONS AND PERSPECTIVES

Altogether our respondents perceived a mainly positive impact of the Parenting Benefits and Parental Leave Law on father participation. In judging the law's impact on fathers' participation we found that men's perceptions depend on socio-economic factors whereas women's don't.

The most positive view of the law's impact on fathers' participation is found among people with:

- a high level of income,
- a strong willingness to take parental leave and
- a satisfying relationship.

In *women* the variables

- satisfying relationship and
- less perceived negative impact on family life of a mother working full-time are most effective on predicting their positive judgement of the law.

In *men* these are mostly socio-economic aspects like

- low educational level,
- high employment status,
- urban place of residency,
- high income of the partner but also
- satisfying relationship and job and
- low importance of an equal relationship.

Overall, those respondents with a higher income are likely to perceive the impact of the Parenting Benefits and Parental Leave Law more positively also because they profit more from those new regulations than other groups. Ergo, financial inducements presumably work better for well-off families. But only if there is a general willingness of men to participate in parental leave do the new Parenting Benefits regulations facilitate the actual decision to take a leave, especially in well-off men,

because the financial loss in doing so is thereby reduced. This general willingness is reported by most respondents, but by more women than men. A greater willingness in men to take parental leave is accompanied by

- a low level of income,
- low importance to them of financial independence and
- their holding “modern” values.

So far, financial benefits and more flexible regulations on parental leave have not resulted in men’s motivation to participate in childcare being put into practice. For men the main inhibitors (slightly more frequently than for women) are job-related worries.

Personal and job-related aspects cannot be manipulated by a single law (at least not in the short run). It can only create financial inducements, not improve employment-related or private circumstances. In other words, the law is probably more successful with satisfied people than with higher socio-economic-level groups, as was however intended. In addition, changing family policy has to be accompanied by changing social, economic and financial policy (Dackweiler, 2006; Höhn *et al.*, 2006).

Although the reported willingness in responding men was quite high, in fact only about 19% drew parenting benefits until 2009, mostly for a short period of time and together with the mother. In many ways traditional roles are still prevalent. In young families only little change in traditional task-sharing has taken place. Maybe the law will help change those role expectations in the long run, since international comparisons indeed show a positive effect of egalitarian family and labour-market policies on the prevalence of “modern” attitudes of fathers (Hofäcker, 2007). The increase in men’s participation over the last three years is only a small success, but we are on a good trajectory.

### Notes

1. Other instruments of family policy, especially the *Kindergeld* (child benefits, at this writing 184 Euros a month per child up to his/her 25<sup>th</sup> birthday) and tax reductions for families still exist. For an overview of German family policy see Leitner *et al.* (2008).
2. Official statistics only inform us about applications for parenting benefits which do not necessarily depend on (full- time) parental leave.
3. We chose this registry based approach instead of a RDD-like sampling strategy or public directories to allow for a prenotification to fight growing refusal rates.

4. The share of women who consider themselves more skilled at raising children could reflect the ambivalence of many women towards fathers' parental leave (Döge and Volz 2002; Gesterkamp 2007).

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Appendix

The actual selection process consisted of many different steps. We needed to start on the federal level to access the administrative units from which our target individuals could be selected at random. The units for selection chosen were based on the theoretical considerations of maximising variation between rural and urban areas, family friendliness, political tradition and economic situation:

1. On the first level we divided the German federal states into four categories regarding employment situation and political tradition. Since fertility and gender roles are considered (partly) dependent upon the economic situation of a region, we selected one representative for each one of those categories: North Rhine-Westphalia was randomly selected as a representative for northern states, being largely Protestant and having a strong working-class; Bavaria in the more Catholic and economically strong South; Saxony in the East (former GDR); and Bremen as representative of the city-states.
2. For each selected federal state’s administrative districts – as the next smaller unit – were assigned to nine categories regarding family friendliness as measured on two dimensions: job-market, demographic factors, work-life balance, living.space, education and recreational value (see Table 6). This assignment was based on a study founded by the Federal Ministry of Family Affairs, Senior Citizens, Women and Youth (2007). For every federal state one administrative district or independent city was selected for each of those categories (if existent).

Table 6  
Categorisation of Regions as to Family Friendliness in the  
“Familienatlas 2007”

		<i>Work-Life Balance, Living-space, Education &amp; Training, Recreation</i>		
		<i>Top third</i>	<i>Middle third</i>	<i>Bottom third</i>
Job-market and demographic factors	Top third	Top-Region for Families	Established Region	Region with potential
	Middle third	Ambitious Region	Stable Region	Inactive Region
	Bottom third	Committed Region	Endangered Region	Declining Region

3. The third step in the selection process consisted in choosing the biggest town/city and the smallest communal unit (condition: 400 inhabitants or more) within those previously selected administrative units. A background consideration was that rurality correlates with traditionalism and therefore has an effect on gender roles (Baur & Otte, 2008; Pickel, 2000; Spellerberg, 2004) and fertility.

Within the 28 resulting administrative units, a stratified sample of 50% women and 50% men of German citizenship and born between 1947 and 1989 was randomly selected.