

Abstract

Title: Fathers on parental leave – Men's experiences of shared parental leave
(Föräldraledig pappa – Mäns erfarenheter av delad föräldraledighet)

Written in Swedish, summary in English.

Author: Anders Chronholm

Doctoral Dissertation at the Department of Sociology, Göteborg University,
Box 720, SE-405 30 GÖTEBORG, Sweden

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The central problem area of this dissertation concerns fathers' experiences of shared parental leave. The study is based on a questionnaire and qualitative interviews with men who had taken advantage of paid parental leave for 120 days or more during the years 1992-1999. The fathers who answered the questionnaire numbered 188 and most of them were the main caregivers of their children during their leave period. The results presented here mainly come from this questionnaire and 19 of the interviews made after the survey.

Both the fathers and their partners were anxious to share the parental leave and the decision often was taken a long time in advance. Many of the men also had made early workplace agreements explaining that they wanted to take a long period of parental leave. Half of the fathers had used 180 or more parental leave days and a majority were alone with their children six hours or more each day. Fifty percent of the women worked full time during the father's parental leave and about twenty percent worked part time. Almost half of the fathers started their parental leave when their children were not more than six months old. A combination of male child-orientation and female work-orientation seems to be the most common pattern among the couples in our study.

From a gender perspective the men's experiences of their parental leave show only small differences between fatherhood and motherhood regarding the care of the child. About two thirds of the men who answered the questionnaire did not think that fathers and mothers should have different tasks. However, many of the men during the interviews could point out differences between themselves and women on parental leave. Especially the women's conversations about female experiences such as pregnancy and breast-feeding could make the fathers feel left out and miss their contact with other men. Those who had contact with other fathers during their parental leave also described their activities during the parental leave as different from women's.

During their parental leave many of the men took more responsibility for housework than they usually did during the time both parents were at home. Some of the fathers found that they gained new insights by being alone at home with their child and became more motivated to do housework. The housework acquired a new meaning for them when they could relate it to the well-being of the child. Of the fathers who completed the questionnaire, 22 percent were not born in Sweden. While the Swedish-born fathers mainly did include housework in their responsibilities during the parental leave, the immigrant fathers seemed to concentrate on child care, mainly leaving the responsibility for housework to the women. A reason for this difference could be that more of the mothers living with Swedish-born fathers were working when the father took parental leave. Although half of the women in both groups were highly educated, only 43 percent of the women living with immigrant fathers were employed during the fathers' parental leave, while 79 percent of the partners of the Swedish-born fathers were working.

Keywords: Parental leave; Fatherhood; Gender relations; Housework; Immigrants.