

## **DO FATHERS CARE ?**

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## **Abstract \***

This paper aims at carrying out an international comparison of fathers' caring time. The time fathers dedicate to caring for their children is typically constrained by the longer working hours culture and the lesser incentives for fathers to take up childcare leave. This paper draws a tentative comparison of the situation in different countries on the basis of time use data as well as data on take up rates of childcare leave. Data from the Multinational Time Use Survey (MTUS) collected at Essex, and from the European Community Household Panel (ECHP) are used for the analysis. The responsiveness of father's childcare time to working time patterns of mothers is investigated by means of descriptive analysis and of econometric multivariate analysis. Policies to combine work and family specifically addressed at fathers in different OECD countries are briefly reviewed and their impact on fathers' caring behaviour is assessed. It is concluded that substantial differences in gender time investment on caring for children persist, which may impact on women's labour market performance, and that policies to provide fathers with incentives to participate further in childcare are needed.

**Keywords:** Gender, labour markets, time use data.

**JEL:** D13, J16

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## **Introduction**

A considerable amount of childcare is provided in-house by parents. Even when parents are not the main carers for their children, they usually provide some basic childcare, which covers activities such as feeding the children, dressing them or bathing them. Most OECD countries have specific policies to enable parents to care for their children. Among these, figure notably maternity, paternity leave and parental leave policies. However, very little is known on how much time parents, do actually spend caring for their children. This article aims at filling this gap by analysing data on the time spent caring for children by parents as well as on take up rates of parental leave, with focus on the behaviour of fathers.

The joint childcare choices of parents have been studied within the framework of studies on the intra-household allocation of time. Traditionally, the time allocated by partners in the same household to paid market work and unpaid household work -which includes, among other activities, caring for the children- has been explained in light of the specialization of the two partners according to comparative advantages in the household and the market. The outcome of this model is typically that a higher male wage rate leads to women specializing in unpaid house-work and men in paid market work. The most radical version of this 'specialization' model, the biological model, argues that the gender-specific division of paid and unpaid work is ultimately due to the natural "biological" advantage of women in child-bearing and connected child-rearing activities. The most recent studies model the intra-household allocation of time within the framework of bargaining theories (see Persson and Jonung, 1997 for a selection of such models): under a co-operative bargaining model, the total household utility is a function of the two individual utility functions of the two partners; under a non-cooperative bargaining framework, one partner's utility dominates the other (Beblo, 1999). However, under all frameworks, the intra-household allocation of time is ultimately driven by the (potential) labour market earnings of the two partners.

The caring choices of fathers have been taken into consideration only recently and paternity leave schemes and the targeting of parental leave at fathers are still rather new.

This paper goes on by analyzing data from the Essex time use surveys on child care time by parents. A tentative analysis of data drawn from the European Community Household Panel (ECHP) on childcare time provided by fathers follows. Next, some information is

presented on different child care schemes and fathers' take up rates in a number of OECD countries. The last section concludes the paper.

## **Empirical findings using the Multinational Time Use Survey data**

Here, data drawn from time budget surveys for a number of countries, harmonized at Essex University, the Multinational Time Use Survey (MTUS), are used to investigate parental-care time of the two parents in couple households. The data used here are drawn from time use surveys armonized and made comparable at Essex University. They cover twelve OECD countries, some of which (Australia, Canada, United Kingdom and United States) for a number of different years.

The households considered here are couple-households, distinguished by the presence and by the age of children (below or above five years). For women, a further distinction is made between full-time workers, part-time workers and housewives.

Within a certain household type, the average time use behaviour of each partner is looked at. The following activities are considered: paid market work; childcare strictly defined<sup>1</sup>, which includes feeding the children, dressing them up, changing them, bathing them, and giving medication; other unpaid household work. Other unpaid work includes the following activities: cooking/food preparation, cleaning dishes, laundry/ironing, house cleaning, odd jobs, gardening, care of pets or domestic animals, shopping, paying household bills, domestic travel (i.e. travel for family reason, which includes taking the children to school and back).

Paid work includes all paid-work and related activities, including time spent on the main job, on any second job, working at home, and time spent travelling to and from work. The figures for paid work are averaged over 365 days per year, including weekends and holidays. The figures for paid work, as in all time use diaries, include 'effective' hours of work, i.e. news-paper reading, talking to colleagues, coffee breaks, private telephone calls, emailing, day-dreaming, etc etc will all be counted out; moreover, individuals on leave are counted as employed but working zero hours, which drives down 'effective' hours of work.

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1. The evidence from the Essex files covers strictly defined childcare activities, which include bathing the children, feeding them and dressing them. There is some evidence that parents spend a considerably larger amount of time in broadly defined child care activities which include also playing with the children or watching them playing, taking them to school, helping them with homework, and so forth. Interestingly, the ratio of the time spent by women on childcare to that spent by men tends to remain stable when one looks at either strictly

The pitfalls of these data are common to all time use surveys, such as non-negligible non-response rate; the complexity of the task of filling in the diary for less educated respondents; incomplete coding of diaries which may be associated with respondents been more busy (selective non-response); under-reporting of activities that are performed for a short time; variation of the activities run or the time spent on different activities within week days and consequent random error bias of estimates based on a particular day -problem made more acute by the fact that household members may be observed on different days; general measurement error problems. It is also possible that in spite of the considerable efforts to harmonize these surveys, some problems of data comparability cross countries and over time may remain.

It should also be kept in mind that usually respondents are asked to fill in the diary what they consider to be the "main activity". This often leads to under-recording of children related activities like playing with the children or watching them playing (while someone is cooking or cleaning or ironing, for example).

The statistics presented relate to the mean time spent in the different activities considered. The following patterns emerge:

- In couples with children aged less than five years, fathers spend almost an hour per day on childcare, mothers about two hours and a half.
- When all children are older than five, fathers spend on average 18 minutes per day on childcare; mothers 42 minutes.
- Women spend on average four and half hours per day doing other unpaid household work; men about two hours<sup>2</sup>.
- Men spend on average almost 6 hours per day on paid work and women almost 3 hours<sup>3</sup>.
- Fathers of young children, aged less than five, tend to work longer hours in paid employment. The reverse is true for mothers of young children.

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defined or broadly defined childcare activities (Klevmarken and Stafford, 1997, for Finland and Sweden; Barrere et al., 2000, for France; Silver, 2000, for Canada).

2. This represents actually quite a substantial contribution by men (at least relative to other studies), which is to be explained by the broad range of activities included under "other unpaid work".

3. One should note here that the figures on hours of paid work average over working and non-working people in the sample.

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Some remarkable cross-countries differences stand out. Danish parents spend the smallest amount of time on childcare, while Anglo-Saxon and Swedish parents spend the largest time. This may reflect, respectively, the scarcity of public childcare facilities in Anglo-Saxon countries and the generous parental leave policies in Sweden, relative to Denmark. On the other hand, Swedish men contribute the most to unpaid household work, though still performing less household work than Swedish women. The burden of other unpaid household work appears to be the least equally shared in Italy, with Italian women doing the largest amount of household work and Italian men the least, at least among the countries considered<sup>4</sup>.

Next, we computed as an indicator of the differences in time allocation by gender, the ratio of the (mean) time spent by women to that spent by men, always for individuals in couple families. We found that, on average, women spend two and half times as much time as men caring for children. This pattern is quite consistent across all OECD countries considered: the female-male childcare ratio varying between three and half for Australia in 1987 and almost two, for the United Kingdom in 1999, Norway, Denmark and Canada, in the nineties.

However, the inequality in the time allocated to caring for the children by partners -as measured by this ratio- is falling overtime. The gender childcare ratio falls from 3.5 for Australia in 1987 to 3.0 for Australia in 1992 and 2.5 for Australia in 1997. For Canada, it falls from 2.8 in 1996 to 1.9 in 1992 and 1998. In the UK, it passes from 2.6, in 1983-87, to 2.0 in 1995 and 1.8 in 1999.

Gender inequality in childcare time appears to remain rather stable over time for the case of the United States -the ratio being equal to 3.1 in 1985 and to 3.0 in 1995.

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4. According to a recent study for Japan (Yamada et al., 1999), based on data from the Japanese Bureau of Statistics, for a sample of young Japanese aged 25-39, including single people and childless persons, in 1986, employed men spent on average 8 hours per day on paid work and 10 minutes per day on child care, while employed women spent on average 5 hours on paid employment and 3 hours on child care. Not employed women spent on average six hours per day on childcare and not employed men 13 minutes. The ratio of market of male unpaid working time to female unpaid working time appears to be 1 to 20 in Japan in the eighties. Unemployed men spend the same time in domestic activities than do employed men. It has been found, according to a survey carried out in 1991, that Portuguese men are those contributing the least to household work, at least among European countries. According to the estimates, about 70% of Portuguese men did not contribute any time to (unpaid) household work activities in 1991 (European Commission, 1998\*). According to some estimates, Spanish women spend 7 times as much time as men caring for children and doing (unpaid) household work (European Commission, 1998\*). On the basis of the 1995 Swiss Labour force survey, it is estimated that men spend on average about 32 hours per week on paid employment and 16 hours on unpaid domestic work; women spend on average 17 hours on paid work and 33 on unpaid domestic work (Bauer, 1998).

Gender inequality in the allocation of childcare time tends to be larger in households with young children, for almost all OECD countries considered -among the exceptions is notably Sweden.

Interestingly, parents appear to share slightly less unequally in other household work than in childcare.

Women tend to spend on average half the time than men do in paid work. However, looking at the total burden of paid and unpaid work , we conclude that the total time spent on paid and unpaid work is, on average, about the same for men and women in all the countries considered. Partners in all couples, with or without children spend on average about eight hours per day on paid and unpaid work activities. The exception are women employed in full-time jobs, that tend to perform an extra hour of total (paid and unpaid) work per day; working on average over nine hours.

The total burden of paid and unpaid work tends to increase by almost an hour for parents of young children. In families with at least one child aged less than five years, parents of either gender spend on average about nine hours per day on total work; women employed full-time, almost ten hours per day.

This evidence favours the hypothesis of a 'double work burden', at home and in the labour market, for women employed full-time in paid activities, who appear to perform also a great deal of unpaid household work. The difference between total hours of work of women working full-time for pay and total hours of men, in all couple-households, is positive for most countries considered, with the notable exception of Sweden. Swedish men appear to spend thirteen more minutes per day on paid and unpaid work activities than Swedish women full-time workers. However, in couple-households with young children, Dutch, Swedish and Danish fathers tend to spend about ten extra minutes per day on paid and unpaid work than full-time employed mothers (setting the above inequality for this cases as negative).

Remarkably, the double burden is the largest for Italian women. Italian women employed full-time perform on average three extra hours of paid and unpaid work per day than Italian men, in average couples; in couples with young children, they perform over two extra hours of total paid and unpaid work.

Interestingly, the time spent caring for children by mothers falls only slightly with hours of paid work; it falls more substantially with the age of children. Among couple-households with

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young children, mothers in paid full-time work spend on average almost two hours per day on childcare, mothers in part-time work, slightly over two hours and non-working mothers, almost three hours. The same figures for families with older children are, respectively, half an hour for mothers in full-time employment, over half an hour for mothers in part-time employment and almost an hour for non-working mothers.

**Table 1. Time spent on child-care and unpaid work by women and men  
in couple families**

Average time per day in couple families with a child under 5

	Men (average for all families)				Women in full-time (paid) work			
	Paid work	Child care	Other unpaid	Total paid and unpaid	Paid work	Child care	Other unpaid	Total paid and unpaid
	Hours	Minutes	Hours	Hours	Hours	Minutes	Hours	Hours
Canada 1986	7,0	<b>53</b>	1,8	9,6		<b>88</b>	3,4	10,3
Canada 1992	6,0	<b>68</b>	2,3	9,4	6,0	<b>109</b>	3,2	11,1
Canada 1998	6,3	<b>89</b>	2,4	10,3	5,9	<b>124</b>	3,0	11,0
USA 1985	6,9	<b>42</b>	2,1	9,6	3,7	<b>108</b>	4,3	9,7
USA 1995 <sup>a</sup>	6,2	<b>33</b>	2,0	8,7	4,9	<b>62</b>	3,3	9,1
Denmark 1987	7,2	<b>28</b>	1,9	9,5	5,4	<b>55</b>	3,1	9,4
Finland 1987	6,1	<b>45</b>	2,1	8,9	3,9	<b>125</b>	3,6	9,5
Sweden 1991	6,4	<b>70</b>	2,5	10,1	3,9	<b>130</b>	3,9	10,0
Italy 1989	6,6	<b>36</b>	1,2	8,4	4,2	<b>96</b>	4,8	10,6
United Kingdom 1983 & 1987	5,7	<b>44</b>	2,0	8,4				
United Kingdom 1995	6,3	<b>87</b>	1,7	9,4	3,5	<b>120</b>	5,4	10,9
United Kingdom 1999	4,9	<b>90</b>	1,6	8,0				
Austria 1992 <sup>b</sup>	6,9	<b>28</b>	1,7	9,1	4,7	<b>62</b>	4,8	10,5
Germany 1992	6,1	<b>59</b>	2,5	9,5	4,1	<b>124</b>	4,2	10,3
Netherlands 1985	5,2	<b>48</b>	2,1	8,1	1,7	<b>115</b>	4,3	7,9
Australia 1987	6,7	<b>50</b>	1,8	9,3	3,5	<b>148</b>	3,8	9,8
Australia 1992	6,2	<b>62</b>	2,0	9,3	4,1	<b>206</b>	3,4	10,9
Australia 1997	6,1	<b>56</b>	2,0	9,0	6,0	<b>101</b>	2,9	10,6
Unweighted average -- most recent year for each country shown	6,3	<b>53</b>	2,0	9,1	4,4	<b>98</b>	3,7	10,1

**Table 1. continued...**

Average time per day in couple families with a child under 5

	Housewives				Women in part-time (paid) work			
	Paid work	Child care	Other unpaid	Total paid and unpaid	Paid work	Child care	Other unpaid	Total paid and unpaid
	Hours	Minutes	Hours	Hours	Hours	Minutes	Hours	Hours
Canada 1986	0,6	<b>169</b>	5,1	8,5				
Canada 1992	0,5	<b>193</b>	4,9	8,6	3,9	<b>139</b>	3,5	9,7
Canada 1998	0,7	<b>218</b>	4,7	9,1	3,1	<b>143</b>	3,8	9,3
USA 1985	0,6	<b>158</b>	5,0	8,2				
USA 1995 <sup>a</sup>	0,1	<b>106</b>	4,4	6,2	3,6	<b>93</b>	3,1	8,3
Denmark 1987	0,6	<b>87</b>	5,4	7,5	4,1	<b>41</b>	4,1	8,9
Finland 1987	0,4	<b>181</b>	4,4	7,8	2,4	<b>131</b>	4,3	8,9
Sweden 1991	0,3	<b>261</b>	5,1	9,7	3,2	<b>118</b>	4,9	10,1
Italy 1989	0,2	<b>120</b>	7,0	9,2				
United Kingdom 1983 & 1987	0,2	<b>141</b>	5,2	7,8				
United Kingdom 1995	0,0	<b>205</b>	4,7	8,1	3,1	<b>154</b>	4,2	9,8
United Kingdom 1999	0,4	<b>202</b>	3,7	7,4	2,7	193	3,8	9,6
Austria 1992 <sup>b</sup>	0,5	<b>116</b>	6,7	9,1	3,2	<b>66</b>	5,4	9,7
Germany 1992	0,1	<b>175</b>	5,8	8,8	2,2	<b>142</b>	5,0	9,6
Netherlands 1985	0,2	<b>147</b>	4,9	7,6	2,3	<b>120</b>	4,4	8,6
Australia 1987	0,1	<b>219</b>	5,1	8,9	2,7	<b>154</b>	4,4	9,7
Australia 1992	0,1	<b>227</b>	4,7	8,5	2,2	<b>189</b>	4,3	9,7
Australia 1997	0,5	<b>169</b>	5,5	8,8	2,9	<b>137</b>	4,6	9,7
Unweighted average -- most recent year for each country shown	0,3	<b>164</b>	5,3	8,4	3,0	<b>130</b>	4,3	9,4

a) For 1992-94, the data available for the United States relate to all parents, including single parents.

b) The data relate to all families with children.

Source: Data provided by Dr. Kimberly Fisher, Essex University.

**Table 2. Ratio of women's time to men's, women working full-time**

	Women f-t work		Housewives		Women p-t work	
	Child care	Total paid and unpaid	Child care	Total paid and unpaid	Child care	Total paid and unpaid
Canada 1986	<b>1,7</b>	1,1	<b>3,2</b>	0,9		
Canada 1992	<b>1,6</b>	1,2	<b>2,8</b>	0,9	<b>2,6</b>	1,0
Canada 1998	<b>1,4</b>	1,1	<b>2,4</b>	0,9	<b>2,1</b>	0,9
USA 1985	<b>2,6</b>	1,0	<b>3,8</b>	0,9		
USA 1995 <sup>a</sup>	<b>1,9</b>	1,1	<b>3,2</b>	0,7	<b>2,2</b>	1,0
Denmark 1987	<b>2,0</b>	1,0	<b>3,1</b>	0,8		
Finland 1987	<b>2,8</b>	1,1	<b>4,0</b>	0,9	<b>4,7</b>	1,0
Sweden 1991	<b>1,9</b>	1,0	<b>3,7</b>	1,0	<b>2,6</b>	1,0
Italy 1989	<b>2,7</b>	1,3	<b>3,3</b>	1,1		
United Kingdom 1983 et 1987			<b>3,2</b>	0,9		
United Kingdom 1995	<b>1,4</b>	1,2	<b>2,4</b>	0,9	<b>3,5</b>	1,0
United Kingdom 1999			<b>2,2</b>	0,9	<b>2,2</b>	1,2
Austria 1992 <sup>b</sup>	<b>2,2</b>	1,2	<b>4,1</b>	1,0		
Germany 1992	<b>2,1</b>	1,1	<b>3,0</b>	0,9	<b>5,1</b>	1,0
Netherlands 1985	<b>2,4</b>	<b>1,0</b>	<b>3,1</b>	0,9		
Australia 1987	<b>3,0</b>	1,1	<b>4,4</b>	1,0		
Australia 1992	<b>3,3</b>	1,2	<b>3,7</b>	0,9	<b>3,8</b>	1,0
Australia 1997	<b>1,8</b>	1,2	<b>3,0</b>	1,0	<b>2,2</b>	1,1
Unweighted average -- most recent year for each country shown	<b>2,1</b>	<b>1,1</b>	<b>3,2</b>	0,9		

Child care includes only time spent feeding the children, bathing them and dressing them. Other unpaid household work includes shopping, cooking, cleaning, gardening, caring for pets, paying bills and domestic transport. Total paid plus unpaid time includes the sum of the time spent in paid market work, childcare and other unpaid household work.

a) For 1992-94, the data available for the United States relate to all parents, including single parents.

b) The data relate to all families with children.

Source: Data provided by Dr. Kimberly Fisher, Essex University.

## **Results of estimation of childcare by fathers using the ECHP**

Using data from the European Household Panel, the time allocated to childcare by men was regressed on a series of variables including demographic and economic characteristics of the individual and their spouses, for a selected sample of men aged 17-49 in couple-households with young children (see Table below).

Caretaking is measured in the ECHP in a very broad way, which includes, for example, time spent playing with the children, while childcare time measured in time use surveys only count activities such as washing the kids, dressing them and feeding them. The ECHP variable we use, is based on a single question on average hours per week spent childcaring while the time use diaries are based on more detailed questions. It follows that data from the two surveys are not comparable.

Results of estimation of the model suggest that the time allocated by men to childcare is responsive to own hours of paid work and to hours of paid work of their spouses. As hours of paid work of the individual increase, hours of childcare decrease by a small amount, which is plausible given the relatively low time spent on childcare by men. Childcare time of men increases also with hours of paid work of their spouses, though by a much smaller extent than in response to own hours of work.

Pooling data for all countries in the ECHP gave an own hours elasticity of -0.24 and an elasticity of 0.12 to hours of paid work of the spouse (both significant at the 5% level). These elasticities were larger if estimated for the sub-sample of individuals in work with spouses working as well and equal, respectively, to -0.46 and to 0.16, signalling that men tend to help out a little more when their spouses are in paid work. In particular, if their spouses doubled their hours of work, men would, on average, increase the time they allocate to childcare by 16 per cent (regression 2 in the Table).

It also emerged that childcare time by men increases significantly with employment in the public sector, a high level of education of the spouse and for large households, with three young children. Childcare time provided by men was found to be significantly lower for self-employed men.

Interestingly, childcare time of Danish and Finish men is more responsive to the level of education of their spouses than to the spouse's hours of paid work.

Descriptive statistics (shown at the bottom of the table) indicate that, in line with what found from different data sources, women in all countries considered tend to have a total working hours burden that exceeds that of men. In particular, hours of paid work and childcare of women exceed by over ten hours per week those of men, this difference being even larger for longer hours of paid work. Women tend to spend about twice as much time as men on childcare, irrespective of their hours of paid work.

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**Table 3. OLS regression of the time spent caring for children by men**

Countries Variables	(1) All countries	(2) All countries; paid work hours >0	(3) All countries; paid work hours>20	(4) All countries; paid work hours>30	Germany	Denmark	Netherlands	France	United Kingdom	Italy	Finland
Constant	3.64**	4.7**	4.7**	5.07**	5.16**	4.6**	2.52**	2.97**	4.72**	1.75	4.8**
Age	-0.01	-0.02	-0.03	-0.02	-0.06	-0.04	0.07	0.02	-0.07	0.071	-0.07
Age squared	-0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	-0.00*	-0.00	0.00	-0.00	0.00
High Education	-0.01	-0.01	0.01	0.01	0.00	-0.02	-0.14**	-0.03	-0.05	-0.06	-0.08
Public sector	0.07**	0.03	0.02	-0.01	0.00	0.16*	0.09*	0.07	0.10	-0.01	0.04
Self-employed	-0.33**	-0.21**	-0.21**	-0.22*	0.08	-0.32	0.22	-0.65**	0.45	-0.26	-0.09
Employed	-0.14*				0.17	0.17	0.20	-0.43**	0.58	-0.11	0.10
Tenure	0.00	0.00	-0.00	0.00	0.02	0.02	-0.00	-0.00	-0.05	0.01	0.00
Tenure squared	-0.00	-0.00	0.00	0.00	-0.00	-0.00	0.00	-0.00	0.004*	-0.00	0.00
<b>Log. hours paid work</b>	-0.10**	-0.46**	-0.49**	-0.40**	-0.22**	-0.17*	-0.28**	0.03	-0.28*	-0.05	-0.17*
2 children aged <16	-0.01	0.02	-0.02	0.02	-0.08	-0.03	0.03	-0.28**	0.03	0.08	0.07
3 children aged <16	0.05*	0.14**	0.15**	0.15**	-0.01	0.15	0.05	-0.14	0.27**	0.09	0.25**
Spouse high-educated	0.05**	0.05*	0.06*	0.06*	-0.04	0.15*	-0.05	-0.03	0.00	0.04	0.23**
Spouse employed	0.07**				0.04	-0.14	0.18**	-0.17	0.11	0.02	0.08
<b>Log. hours paid work of the spouse</b>	0.05**	0.16**	0.22**	-0.01	0.01	0.07	0.05**	0.14**	0.03	0.08**	0.02
R squared	8.1	7.0	6.0	4.8	14.7	10.3	18.6	9.9	8.2	7.0	4.4
No. observations	5258	3066	2241	1693	435	383	790	461	337	651	426
Mean hours of paid work per week	39.8 (15.6)	43.5 (10.5)	44.1 (10.2)	44.5 (10.0)	40.6 (13.9)	37.8 (13.9)	40.5 (12.5)	38.1 (15.3)	40.9 (17.4)	39.6 (13.9)	39.1 (20.4)
Mean childcare hours per week	23.8 (18.1)	24.4 (18.1)	25.3 (18.7)	25.9 (18.7)	23.9 (16.0)	32.2 (22.7)	19.8 (14.4)	19.9 (16.2)	32.8 (25.7)	20.0 (12.9)	27.5 (19.2)
Spouse mean hours of paid work per week	19.6 (18.6)	31.5 (12.6)	37.2 (8.9)	40.4 (7.5)	15.3 (17.2)	26.2 (15.7)	11.9 (13.6)	23.9 (18.3)	19.4 (17.6)	19.8 (19.1)	26.6 (19.9)
Spouse mean childcare hours per week	55.6 (25.0)	50.2 (23.7)	47.0 (23.1)	45.8 (23.1)	56.6 (23.7)	54.7 (25.2)	59.4 (24.0)	46.9 (22.6)	75.9 (23.6)	43.6 (18.5)	60.1 (27.7)

The data are drawn from the ECHP. The dependent variable is the logarithm of childcare time, which is measured in hours per week. The estimation sample is made up of men aged 17 to 49 that spent at least one hour per week on childcare and that are part of couple households with all children aged less than 16 and at least one child aged less than 12. A (\*) indicates statistical significance at 5% level; (\*\*) at 10% level. The first set of specification for all countries, regressions 1 to 4, includes no country dummies. In the specifications for all countries, hours of work restrictions apply to both partners. The countries included in the ECHP for which data were available are: Germany, Denmark, the Netherlands, Belgium, Luxembourg, France, United-Kingdom, Ireland, Italy, Greece, Spain, Portugal, Austria, Finland.

## Fathers' take up of paternity and parental leave

While maternity leave has been widespread in OECD countries for many years, paternity leave and "parental leave" are more recent developments.

To encourage fathers to spend more time on childcare, some OECD countries have introduced paternity leave policies and targeted part of parental leave at fathers<sup>5</sup> (European Commission, 1998a and b). However, to date, the take up rate of such programmes by fathers is quite low, with the exception of Scandinavian countries, where it reaches almost hundred per cent in the public sector (see Table).

Specific paternity leave entitlements are still relatively uncommon and of short duration. They vary from three days or less in Greece, Portugal Spain, the Netherlands, Belgium, to ten days in Sweden, eleven days in France, fourteen days in Denmark, Iceland and Norway and eighteen days in Finland. They are usually paid at the full rate (although at a flat rate in the private sector in Denmark and 80 per cent of usual earnings in Sweden).

In most countries, fathers are also eligible to take parental or childcare leave. In this respect, it has been found that when a total leave time is available that can be taken by either parent, mothers make up the bulk of the users. To provide fathers with incentives to take the leave, in some countries, fathers have been given an individual right to all or part of the childcare leave (Austria, Belgium, Greece, Denmark, Italy, the Netherlands, Sweden). In the case of the Netherlands, parental leave is a six-months part-time leave for either parent, since 1991; since 1999 also a right to reduce (or increase) working hours by twenty per cent was given to all employees in the Netherlands, independently of their family situation.

Moreover, some countries have recently targeted part of the childcare leave at fathers on a "use-it-or-lose-it" basis. In Norway, for example, a "daddy month" has been introduced since 1993; in Sweden, since 1995. In Austria, if fathers take up some parental leave the duration of the total leave available to either parent is extended by twenty-six weeks.

There is considerable cross-countries variation concerning compensation of the leave. Especially for fathers, whether the leave is paid or not, and to what extent (flat rate or some more or less tangible proportion of earnings) may have a large impact on the probability of taking it up.

The limited evidence available suggest that fathers take up little of what child-care leave is available to them. For example, in 1995 only 5 per cent of fathers in the European Union took

paternity leave (European Commission 1998a). However, paternity leave take-up rates have reached 58 per cent in Denmark (100 per cent in the public sector, where the leave is fully paid), 64 per cent in Finland and 80 per cent in Norway [European Commission (1998b) and Ellingsaeter, 1998]. Take up rates of paternity leave reach almost sixty per cent also in France (DREES, 2003).

In addition, in some of the Nordic countries, fathers are now largely taking up the child-care leave that is reserved for them. Recent take-up rates of child-care leave include almost 80 per cent for Norway [OECD (1999c)] and 36 per cent for Sweden [Sundstrom and Duvander (2000)]. Take up rates of childcare leave average 10 per cent in Denmark, 13 per cent in the Netherlands, two per cent in France and less than one per cent in Austria [European Commission (1998b); Fagnani 1998].<sup>6</sup>

In spite of the increases in take up rates of childcare leave by fathers, the duration of the leave taken up is considerably less than that taken by mothers in all countries, with the exception of the Netherlands (Bruning and Plantenga, 1999). In Sweden, the introduction of the "daddy month" in 1995 was associated both with an increase in the overall take-up of leave by fathers and with a decrease in the average length of the leave taken, from 34 days in 1995 to 27 days in 1999.

According to various studies [European Commission (1998b); Sundstrom and Duvander (2000)] employers' attitudes are often quoted by fathers as an important reason for their low take-up rates. However, mothers' attitudes may also play an important role [Bjoonsberg (1998), Giovannini (1998), Sundstrom and Duvander (2000)]. In particular, in Sweden, it is more educated and younger men with a well-educated wife and a small number of children that are more likely to take the childcare leave (Sundstrom and Duvander, 2000). Similar findings apply to the Netherlands, where men taking up part-time parental leave are mostly highly educated men, often working in the public sector -where the scheme is fully paid- and with a well educated spouse, who is often also taking up the part-time leave.

Answers of fathers to surveys carried out in a number of European countries indicate that the potential opposition of employers is one of the reasons for the low take up of paternity and parental leave (European Commission, 1998b). In particular, the long-working hours culture is generally considered as an important obstacle to more equal sharing of the two partners in

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5. The aim of these policies is also to improve equality of opportunities for women in the labour market (European Commission, 1998a) and it has been argued that, by doing so, they may also contribute to raise fertility rates (Joshi, 1998).

6. These were mainly well-educated dual-earner couples where both parents worked a four-day week.

childcare (and other unpaid household work) and to the achievement of equality of opportunities for women in the labour market (Creighton, 1999; European Commission, 1998; Heath et al., 1998; United States Council of Economic Advisers, 1999).

Generally, it appears that fathers lack a 'fathering' model as most of them take their fathers as a negative model but have no alternative reference model.

**Table 4. Fathers' take up rates of paternal and parental leave**

Countries	Maternity Leave	Paternity Leave	Parental Leave	Father's take up rates
Australia	52 weeks, unpaid	none	None	
Austria	16 weeks	none	78 weeks; 26 must be taken by the father or else are lost; paid flat rate	1% per year on average, for parental leave
Belgium	15 weeks	3 days	13 weeks for each parent, flat rate	
Canada	17 weeks, of which 15 paid at 60% earnings		10 weeks	3-4% of individuals taking parental leave, on average, per year
Czech Republic				
Denmark	18 weeks; the last 10 can be taken by fathers.	14 days, flat rate (100% public sector)	65 weeks, paid flat rate	10% for last 10 weeks of maternity leave; 58% for paternal leave (almost 100% in the public sector, where it is paid at 100%); 10% for parental leave
Finland	17.5 weeks	18 days	24 weeks, paid at 66%	64% for paternity leave; 3% parental leave
France	16 weeks	3 days, paid 100%	156 weeks for each parent, unpaid	Almost 100% for paternity leave; 2% for parental leave
Germany	14 weeks	none	104 weeks flat rate; plus 52 weeks unpaid	1-2% for some parental leave
Greece		1 day	15 weeks for each parent (unpaid)	No fathers take parental leave
Hungary				
Iceland		14 days	26 weeks flat rate	Less 1% for parental leave
Ireland	14 weeks, plus 4 unpaid	none	none	
Italy	Some can be taken by fathers.	none	26 weeks, at 30 %	
Korea	8.5 weeks	none	none	
Japan	14 weeks	none	none	
Luxembourg				
Mexico				
Netherlands	16 weeks	2 days	13 weeks for each parent, unpaid	13% for part-time leave.
New Zealand	14 weeks	2 weeks	none	
Norway	See parental leave	14 days	29 weeks, of which 9 must be taken by the mother, 4 by the father; at 100%; plus 52 weeks, unpaid	80% for paternal leave; 80% for the 4 weeks (compulsory) parental leave
Poland				
Portugal	Some can be taken by fathers	2 days	104 weeks unpaid	
Spain	Some can be taken by fathers	2 days		
Sweden		10 days, paid at 80%	450 days, of which 30 must be taken by the father or else are lost; paid at 80	36% for parental leave, including the daddy month
Switzerland	8-12 weeks	none		
Turkey				
United Kingdom	14 weeks, plus 26 weeks unpaid	none	3 months unpaid, according to EC directive	
United States	12 weeks, unpaid	none	none	

Source: European Commission, 1998; Curtin, 1999; OECD, Employment Outlook, 2001, DREES,2003.

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