

Chapter 7

Fathers on Leave Alone in Spain: ‘Hey, I Want to Be Able to Do It Like That, Too’

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7.1 Introduction

Spain underwent the transition from the male breadwinner to the dual-earner family model somewhat later than other developed countries. Change was most intense in the period of strong economic and employment growth between 1995 and 2007, with a reversal observed as unemployment rose from early 2008. The percentage of 25- to 49-year-old women in paid employment climbed from 39 % in 1995 to 66 % in 2007, receding to 61 % in 2012. As a result of the employment crisis, while male single-earner families with children under 6 are estimated to have dropped by 22 %, female single-earner families leapt by 181 % and families with no earners by 162 %. At the same time, the number of dual-earner families dipped by 4 % (Moreno-Mínguez 2015). In the wake of the economic crisis, employment has become a scarce and highly valued resource, shaping couples’ strategies for reconciling family life and careers when faced with the need to protect their sources of income.

While policies to further equality between the sexes have long been in place (the first equality plan was introduced in 1989) and have explicitly pursued the harmonisation of work and family life, that challenge has yet to be systematically and comprehensively addressed. Debates around the question have been public and sensitisation programmes have been formulated, often under the umbrella of European initiatives, although only partial measures have been adopted (Meil 2006b; Wall and Escobedo 2009)

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This chapter deals first with the ways that access to paternity leave has been gradually expanded in Spain and the type of leave available for harmonising work and family life. That is followed by a discussion of leave usage and the factors involved. The third section describes the characteristics and selection of the interviewees (fathers on leave alone). The reasons for using leave, societal reactions, fathers' own reactions to their childcaring experience and its medium- and long-terms effects are also analysed.

7.2 Men's Entitlement to Childcare Leave

In Spain, leave for childbirth and childcare have traditionally revolved around paid maternity leave, instituted in 1931, the paid nursing and the non-paid full-time or part-time parental leave, both introduced in 1970. Fathers have only had the right to a paid birth leave of 1 day (since 1931) or 2 days (since 1980) (Escobedo and Meil 2016). Initially designed for working mothers, entitlement to leave has been gradually extended to fathers, despite long-standing reforms to advance gender equality (Meil 2006a). The first measure in this respect was passed in 1980, when the right to full- or part-time parental leave was extended to both parents. Initially, men were eligible only when both spouses had paid work and when the wife refrained from taking the leave. In other words, this leave was regarded not as an individual, but rather a family entitlement (Escobedo et al. 2012).

In the wake of the first Action Plan on Equal Opportunities for Women, reforms were introduced in 1989 specifically to prevent leave-taking from adversely affecting women's careers. These reforms reinforced legal protection to guarantee the return to work and allowed men to take nursing leave and 4 weeks of maternity leave, consecutively but not simultaneously with the mother. These rights were not established as male entitlements, however. A father's eligibility was contingent upon the mother's decision to yield part of her leave, and to qualify, both parents had to have paid employment. The father was also entitled to take maternity leave in the event of the mother's death or to care for an adopted child, depending on the parents' agreement. The reforms introduced in 1999 to transpose EU directives on maternity and parental leave (92/85/EEC and 96/34/EC) aimed primarily to promote harmonisation of work and family life and reinforce legal protection against discrimination for taking parental leave. The law also sought to "enable" men to "care for their children" by extending their possibility to use maternity leave by 10 weeks, allowing fathers to take their leave consecutively or simultaneously with mothers, and acknowledging parental leave as a worker's individual rather than a family entitlement (unless both spouses work for the same employer).

The underlying philosophy was, therefore, to extend fathers' entitlement to take parental leave intended for mothers, without encouraging positive incentives (Meil 2006b). Men's involvement in childcare was not explicitly encouraged until 2007, with the creation of paternity leave under an act designed to further equality between men and women (Escobedo et al. 2012). Paternity leave acknowledges men's

entitlement to 13 days of paid leave for childbirth at their full salary, in addition to the 2 days provided for in earlier legislation, subject to having worked for at least 360 days throughout their career. This leave may be taken at the same time as or after the mother's maternity leave, although no incentives are in place for taking it after the mother returns to work. There is no established policy nor significant social debate around the need to actively encourage fathers to take parental leave to care for their children alone when the mother has paid work. That does not mean, however, that in the context of families' strategies to reconcile family and work life, the benefits offered by the law have been ignored or that no fathers have taken the leave available to care for their children while the mother works. The leave options available in Spain at this time are summarised below (Escobedo et al. 2014).

Birth leave. Two days leave, which is increased to 4, if it implies geographical mobility, paid by the employer. This leave is also granted in case of death, accident, hospitalisation, serious illness or surgical intervention of children or any other relative till the second degree.

Paternity leave. In addition to birth leave, the Social Security system pays the father's full salary for 13 days, although under some collective bargaining agreements (mostly in the public sector), the leave may be extended for 1 or 2 additional weeks (the city of Madrid grants its employees a 4-week paid leave, for instance). It may be taken at childbirth or immediately after maternity leave.

Maternity leave. As a general rule, women are compelled to take 6 weeks off after birth, while the mother may yield the rest of the 16-week entitlement (plus 2 weeks for each additional child in multiple births, or longer under some collective bargaining agreements) to the father. In the event of the mother's death, the father may take the leave and where children are adopted or taken in under foster care arrangements the parents can decide who will take the leave and for how long. The Social Security system covers the cost of this leave in full.

Nursing leave. Parents are entitled to two half-hour paid breaks per day through to the ninth month (twelfth in the public sector) after birth. Under respective collective bargaining agreements, this leave can be taken consecutively as up to 2 additional weeks (4 in the public sector) of maternity or paternity leave. Only one of the parents is eligible, irrespective of whether one or both work. The cost of this leave is covered in full by the employer.

Full-time parental leave. Either parent may take this leave until the child is 3 years old. It is wholly flexible and the number of leave periods is unlimited. Through the first year, employees are entitled to return to the same job and thereafter to a similar job. It is generally unpaid, although in 2000 seven of the 17 regions envisaged a lump sum payment under certain circumstances. By 2016, however, such support was only provided in two.

Part-time parental leave: Either parent may reduce the working day by one-eighth to one-half to care for children up to 12 years old. This leave is unpaid (although some regions provide for a lump sum payment under certain circumstances).

7.3 Parental Leave-Taking by Men

The evidence suggests that men use the range of leave in an uneven pattern. Paternity leave is used widely, with around 250 000 beneficiaries per year, or 55 % of total births, according to Social Security statistics (Ministry of Employment and Social Security 2014). However, these national data underestimate somewhat the take-up rate of paternity leave and other forms of leave, as public officials are excluded. According to a 2012 survey on parental leave-taking, 75 % of eligible fathers took paternity leave (Romero-Balsas 2012; Escobedo et al. 2014), while the men who did not were mostly either self-employed or working under short-term or no employment contracts. The leave was taken for the entire time stipulated by 97 % of beneficiaries. As a rule, paternity leave is taken immediately after childbirth and hence simultaneously with the mother's maternity leave.

Other types of leave, however, were used only by a minority of fathers. As shown in Table 7.1, around 5500 men took fully paid maternity leave per year, with the number rising up to 2010 and declining thereafter. Despite these fluctuations, the percentage of the total leave taken held steady at about 1.7 %. While this value may not initially seem very high, for it covers only 1.2 % of the total births, the fact that 53 218 fathers took the leave over the last 10 years should not be overlooked. According to the 2012 Parental Leave survey,¹ 7 % of eligible fathers took maternity leave (Meil and Romero-Balsas 2016).

Full-time parental leave were taken by very few parents, for they are not paid. While taken primarily by women, around 1 500 fathers took them yearly, accounting for 5 % of the total of such leave and 0.3 % of all births. Again, while the percentage is small, it meant that 12 645 men took this leave over the last 10 years. Moreover, the proportion of men using the leave is on the rise. According to the 2012 Parental Leave survey, 0.5 % of eligible fathers took this type of leave.

No official statistics are available on nursing or part-time (reduced working day) parental leave-taking. According to the 2012 Parental Leave survey, 8 % of fathers reported that they took nursing leave and 1.8 % that they exercised their right to reduce their working day to care for their children (Meil and Romero 2016).

The number of fathers taking some form of leave alone to care for their children while mothers returned to work is difficult to calculate with any accuracy. However, an assessment can be estimated if it is assumed that fathers are on leave alone where they use part of the mother's maternity leave (when she returns to employment) or in cases where fathers take full-time parental leave. Using records of these cases for one year, Table 7.1 shows that 4919 fathers took maternity leave and 1541 took full-time parental leave in 2013. Under these assumptions it is estimated that over the

¹ The *Survey on parental leave-taking in Spain*, is based on a national representative sample of 4 000 people between the ages of 25 and 60 interviewed by telephone between January and March 2012. The questionnaire was designed by the research group in which the authors are integrated and the survey was performed by the survey institute CAPDEA of the University of Granada. The funding was provided by the Ministry of Science and Innovation, grant number CSO2009-11328.

Table 7.1 Total number of caregivers taking leave (absolute values for women and men and percentage of the total for men)

	Maternity leave			Paternity leave	Full-time parental leave		
	Women	Men	%	Men	Women	Men	%
2005	296115	5269	1.8	–	27457	946	3.3
2008	353585	5575	1.6	279756	36300	1471	3.9
2009	334786	5726	1.7	273024	32549	1393	4.1
2010	326752	5805	1.8	275637	33239	1573	4.5
2011	318607	5798	1.8	269715	32599	1529	4.5
2012	293704	5028	1.7	245867	28163	1488	5.0
2013	283923	4919	1.7	237988	28038	1541	5.2

Note: as these data refer to people with Social Security coverage, they exclude public officials, who are protected under a separate system

Source: Ministry of Labour and Social Security, statistics yearbook, several years

last 10 years no fewer than 65,000 Spanish men took some form of leave alone to care for their children while their partners returned to work.

7.4 Factors Encouraging Men to Take Leave Alone

Since no specific studies have been found for Spain on men taking leave alone to care for their children, the starting point for this discussion is essentially the literature on childcare leave. Significant differences persist in Spain between women's and men's roles in the family. The most recent research shows that mothers devote five-fold more time than fathers to childcare (Garcia-Mainar et al. 2011), the widest gap in all of Europe. This finding calls for an urgent analysis of practices that would favour a change in men's assumption of responsibilities for the care of children. Parental leave provide a framework from which childcare formulas favouring men's more active role may emerge.

The research evidence suggests four types of factors which influence leave-taking by men and women: leave characteristics, job-related factors, the couple's beliefs about child-rearing and the institutional and family context.

Firstly, leave characteristics, i.e., eligibility and the conditions involved, are crucial to the decision to take leave. Remuneration (whether and to what extent leave is paid) is a determinant in this respect. That most fathers take paternity leave (Flaquer and Escobedo 2014; Romero-Balsas et al. 2013), during which they are paid 100% of their salaries, stands as confirmation. Nonetheless, in a study on full-time parental leave based on data for 2006, Lapuerta (2013) found a higher take-up rate among women in Spanish regions where some manner of remuneration was in place (salary-related in most cases) than where none existed, but observed no significant differences for men. This finding suggests that remuneration is a necessary but not a sufficient requirement for leave-taking among men.

Another leave characteristic is the degree to which jobs are guaranteed, i.e., whether upon conclusion the leave-taker can return to the same or a similar (same category) position or simply to the same type of employment contract. Earlier studies have found that some employees have to accept less favourable working conditions, in particular with respect to promotion, upon return to work after a leave (Evertsson and Duvander 2011). One of the reasons identified by other authors (Romero-Balsas et al. 2013) for not taking longer parental leave was that parents anticipated such penalties. Lastly, the minimum and maximum duration and the possibility of reducing working hours are other factors to be considered. Some authors (Flaquer and Escobedo 2014) have suggested that irrespective of the type of leave, the factors favouring take-up by men are similar.

A second group of factors are related to the quality of each partner's job (Romero-Balsas 2012; Flaquer and Escobedo 2014). Earlier studies have shown that the present system of leave favours re-conciliation essentially among people better positioned on the labour market (Lapuerta et al. 2011). For that reason, it is anticipated that the present Spanish context, characterised by high unemployment (around 25%), deteriorating working conditions and high job uncertainty (García and Ruesga 2014; Alonso and Fernández Rodríguez 2013), discourages leave-taking. From a microeconomic perspective, while the equation is not simple, the couple's job situation is a determinant: men would be expected to act according to cost/benefit logic to maximise their position on the labour market (in terms of salary and stability). Firstly, as discussed above in connection with paternity leave, men are more likely to take it when their partner is employed (Escot et al. 2012, 2014). Where couples decide that one of their members should take a leave, that decision is informed, economically speaking (Becker 1991), by the consequences for both in terms of economic resources and job protection.

Lastly, couples' beliefs about "good child-raising", i.e., about who should perform childcare and how, are determinants for adopting minority strategies, such as fathers' assuming the responsibility alone. According to one philosophy, childcare is more ideally provided by the father or the mother than by other agents such as grandparents or nursery schools. Other couples, in contrast, prioritise employment and adopt a more pragmatic approach to child-rearing, in which the importance of the agents involved is based on their utility measured as their ability to accommodate the parents' working hours (Romero-Balsas et al. 2013). These ideas are also related to social norms on the roles of the sexes traditionally associated with women and men in family-based societies such as Spain's (Moreno Mínguez 2007).

Finally, the institutional context or the degree of development of public and private childcare services and the participation of other family members is a determinant for understanding how men and women negotiate child-rearing and therefore leave-taking. In Spain, along with the aforementioned policy designed to favour parental leave, the institutionalisation of children between the ages of 0 and 6 years old in child care settings has grown substantially of late: the enrolment rate of 3-year-olds rose from 38.4% in 1991 to over 90% beginning in 2000, while the rate for children under 3 climbed from 3.3% in 1991 to 35.3% in 2013 (MEC 2016). Moreover, the data indicate that grandparents' involvement in childcare has risen

significantly (Meil and Rogero-García 2015): while in 1993, 15 % of grandfathers and 14 % of grandmothers 65 years of age or older reported that they were caring for their grandchildren at the time of the survey, in 2010 the percentages were 37 and 33 %, respectively. At the same time, the proportion of grandparents claiming to care for their grandchildren daily rose from 11 % of the total over 65 in 2006 to 17 % in 2010.

7.5 The Leave-Taking Experience and Its Effects on Men

Prior studies concluded that the present childcare leave scheme reinforces the differences between the sexes because it fosters leave-taking primarily by women (Castro García and Pazos Morán 2012; Lapuerta et al. 2011). Several studies on Spain found that fathers taking leave exhibited greater involvement in other domestic and childcare tasks than non-leave-takers (Fernández-Cornejo et al. 2016). In particular, Haas and Hwang (2008) and Meil (2013) observed that the longer the leave, the greater the time subsequently spent caring for children. This type of leave may, then, contribute to a more equitable distribution of such tasks between the two partners. Nonetheless, the existence of a causal relationship between leave-taking and greater involvement in childcare is difficult to determine, for the fathers who take such leave tend to be more involved *a priori*, or at least more aware of the desirability of participating in raising their children (Meil 2013; Tanaka and Waldfogel 2007). At the same time, other studies suggest that while men who take leave appear to participate more fully in domestic chores, they do not necessarily spend more time caring for their children than others. Indications of this trend were identified by Romero-Balsas (2015) for Spain, Hosking et al. (2010) for Australia and Versantvoort (2010) for The Netherlands.

No studies have been found on the effects of leave-taking on father-child bonding in Spain. Like their counterparts in other countries, Spanish men might be expected to stress that one of the effects of caring for their children alone is closer bonding to their children (Haas and Hwang 2008; Seward et al. 2006).

7.6 Methodology

In keeping with general criteria, a qualitative strategy was adopted to analyse “fathers on leave alone”. Ten fathers who took one of the aforementioned leave alone for at least 8 weeks while their partners worked were interviewed and their discourse was analysed. The research aimed to ascertain their reasons for taking leave and their every-day experiences of leave. The fathers were recruited for the sample with the aid of human resource managers after an extensive campaign in private companies and public institutions. The main difficulty encountered, given the minority status of the population, was to attract respondents, a process that

involved unsuccessfully contacting a substantial number of potential subjects. The respondents' main characteristics were as follows:

- working in: public sector (6), private sector (4)
- profession: rural police officers (2), electro-mechanical technician (1), lab technician (1), clerical worker (1), primary schoolteacher (1), janitor (1), consultant (2), nurse (1)
- type of leave: full-time parental leave (3), part-time parental leave (2), maternity leave (3), nursing leave (2)
- duration: maternity leave, usually the 10-week maximum; nursing leave, 4-weeks maximum in conjunction with a few weeks of maternity leave; full-time parental leave, around 3 months; and part-time parental leave, either 6 months or 3 years
- number of children: 1 (4); 2 (6)
- age of youngest child (at the time of the interview): average: 2.5 years (min: 1; max: 7).
- respondent age (at the time of the interview): average: 39.3 (min: 32. max: 50).
- educational background: primary school (0); secondary school (5), university (5)
- couple's relative educational background: same educational level (5), woman's level higher (1); man's level higher (4).
- place of residence: small town (5), large town (1), large city (4)

The Spanish version of the interview guide for the Fathers on Leave Alone project was used. All interviews were conducted by telephone, a medium whose suitability for in-depth interviews was endorsed by earlier studies (Muntanyola Saura and Romero Balsas 2013). Audio recordings were made of all interviews. The field work was conducted in May 2013 and February 2014.

Interviewee discourse was analysed using grounded theory (Glaser and Strauss 2009). In a first phase, based on the objectives pursued, codes and code families were created. In a second, the items addressed and relevant to the analysis were coded using Atlas.ti software.

7.7 Reasons for Taking Leave Alone

As discussed above, taking leave alone is a decision infrequently adopted by men. Fathers opting to do so consequently provided elaborate reasons for their choice. While those reasons varied, most were related to their partners' job situation and the type of leave and child-rearing models involved. Firstly, all fathers were wage-earners whose jobs were not endangered by leave-taking. The assurance of being able to return to work was instrumental in the decision, along with the type of leave taken, findings consistent with other quantitative studies on leave-taking in Spain (Lapuerta et al. 2011; Romero-Balsas 2012). The reasoning put forward by Gerard was illustrative in this respect.

(My wife) said 'why don't you apply for a cut-back in working hours?' so I looked into it. I wanted to apply for a full-time parental leave, no? But with the crisis and all, the (company) clerical staff told me not to apply for a full-time parental leave, because I risked losing my position; I could be side-lined, so then I opted for cutting back on my hours. (Gerard, laboratory technician, 35)

The reasons given by respondents, however, referred less to men's employment circumstances than to women's. That situation is consistent with more intense leave-taking among men whose partners have paid work (Escot et al. 2012, 2014). Several other motivations for taking leave alone can be identified in this context.

- (1) Men took leave when their partners ran their own business, with or without employees, that could not be left unattended without jeopardising the future viability of the firm and hence the family's financial future. This was reported by Ander, for instance, a rural police officer, whose wife runs a company with eight employees, and Daniel, a clerical worker in a medium-sized company, whose wife is a self-employed veterinarian. These men opted to use part of the maternity leave and the nursing leave on the implicit assumption that none of the time allowed by the legislation for remunerated leave to care for the couple's baby should be left untaken.
- (2) Men took leave alone to protect their wives' jobs where couples felt that the woman's leave-taking would lead to her dismissal. Manuel, a rural police officer, used part of the maternity leave and the nursing leave to ensure that his partner, a temporary public official whose employment contract is renewable yearly, would be hired.
- (3) Men took leave alone when they earned less than their wives and preferred not to outsource baby's childcare, either on principle or for financial reasons. Pedro, a mechanic in a large company whose wife is an executive, took a 50-% reduction in working hours for 3 years because

both my parents work... my wife is from Valencia and her parents live there... and we decided that instead of spending the money to have someone come in to take care of the babies, it would be better to have them take it out of my salary. So I care for them, I take them here and there and get to enjoy my children (Pedro, mechanic, 37).

Juan, a high school janitor whose wife is a schoolteacher, was in the same position. He took a full-time, unpaid parental leave for 18 months for each of his children because they had no family living close enough, and did not want to impose on them, but primarily for affective reasons:

To enjoy my fatherhood, something that's so often talked about and so unfairly treated, and I really wanted to; and besides, it was our own choice that we took freely: no-one pressured us into it. (Juan, janitor, 50).

Not all fathers alleged primarily work-related or economic reasons, however. Others claimed that the main motivation was to become more involved in fatherhood than the 2 weeks of paternity leave allowed. Their reasoning tended to be simple and uncomplicated, focusing on the idea of "enjoyment" and "feeling like it", as in the case of Pedro (mechanic, 37) and David (married to a schoolteacher), who said:

(It was) essentially to spend time with my son and because I wanted to enjoy that stage of his life... and because we were in a position to. (David, schoolteacher, 35).

In other words, taking leave alone is associated with the feasibility of doing so and the idea that fatherhood and childcare are pleasurable. Only one respondent gave more elaborate reasons, which revolved around the leave, childcare and bonding with children. Carlos claimed that:

(It was) a personal issue, I wanted to be a more hands-on father and bond with my daughter from the very beginning and, well, it was also a political decision: I'm a member of pro-feminist groups... and I believe you should practise what you preach. (Carlos, consultant, 49).

While fathers' desire to be with their babies was present in all cases, that desire was more explicit and accorded greater weight where leave was unpaid than when it was remunerated. For fathers taking part of the maternity or nursing leave, the discourse revolved around instrumental reasons in particular, probably because mothers only yield part of their maternity or nursing leave where they are unable to satisfactorily harmonise family and work life. As taking unpaid leave entails forfeiting part of the couple's income and counters social expectations, its use calls for a more detailed justification. The underlying logic seems to suggest that the first 16 weeks of maternity leave are socially viewed as the time that direct parental care is needed. That is, in this period, care should be provided by the mother, but where that is not possible, her leave should not be forfeited, but taken by the father. Beyond the duration of maternity leave, the solution for infant childcare does not appear to be socially defined. Hence the use of full- or part-time parental leave is just one more re-conciliation resource that fathers use only when highly motivated to do so.

7.8 Reactions in the Social and Work Communities

The reactions of respondents' family and friends was largely acceptance and support for the decision to take leave alone, with one exception – criticism from an informant's mother- Daniel reported: “my mother was more critical... ‘What’s this now? My son, who should be the breadwinner, has to stay home doing the house-cleaning while his wife is out working instead of caring for their daughter?’” (Daniel, clerical worker, 44).

Consequently, the respondents did not feel the need to explain or justify their decision to their family or close friends. However, the reactions were less uniform at the workplace. Respondents provided much more extensive, detailed and nuanced accounts of the workplace reactions and their own response to them.

The most common workplace reaction was surprise, According to Ander “... they'd never seen anything like it before and they were mostly surprised” (Ander, police officer, 35). Others described neutral reactions, and some respondents acknowledged the existence of depreciative comments from their co-workers. On occasion these comments called for explanations, such as for Pedro (mechanic, 37),

some of whose co-workers were unaware of the possibility of taking leave alone; while on others they were chauvinistic, as for Gerard (laboratory technician, 35) or Carlos, a partial transcription of whose interview follows.

Well there were a few slightly adverse remarks, such as ... well, like 'but aren't children brought up by their mothers?', that sort of thing; not everyone, but let's say that the most common reaction was ... (surprise) and then some minority reactions of displeasure or dislike, but unfavourable or not very favourable, no, not as a whole; most people were just surprised. (Carlos, consultant, 49).

That surprise was the most common reaction at the workplace is consistent with the fact that respondents had to rationalise their leave-taking. This response mirrors the novelty and break with normative social behaviour expected of working fathers. The surprise generated led to a need to justify the decision, which then entailed invoking the financial or work-related situations referred to earlier, as illustrated by Pedro.

All I felt was... especially ...the first day, I mean the first day I started to work that way ... and... a couple of people approached me in the factory... I felt a little, I don't know, ashamed. Oh, I really don't know how to explain it really. I don't know what I could say... but anyway... when like people ask 'why did you take it?' ... I said, look, because we're better off economically this way... and then you could see how people... 'oh, OK, that's great, of course, man, that's like whatever' ... and then I... well I just took it like something normal... (Pedro, mechanic, 37).

The reason why co-workers expressed surprise may be because leave are generally thought of as a resource designed especially for women (Castro García and Pazos Morán 2012; Lapuerta et al. 2011). As discussed below, however, in connection with indifference, the workplace reaction did not always call for justifying the choice.

Even though most of the respondents noted that the reaction at their workplace was surprise, a minority claimed the contrary. They explained that lack of surprise on the grounds that they had pioneered other decisions, not only related to leave or the sharing of childcare tasks. Their decision was therefore accepted at the workplace as consistent with their role as father and worker. David, for instance, replied as follows.

Well when I first announced it, they weren't surprised because they know me and they expected as much; they really were not surprised when I took the leave. (David, school-teacher, 35).

Some fathers noted that their social circles even expressed admiration for their being on leave alone. A decision that placed involvement with their children over the possible detriment to their career expectations could give rise to admiration in inner circles, as Daniel noted.

I felt good, I felt good because in the end... it was more admiration, and some of my most sensitive friends, like I said before, told me as much. (Daniel, clerical worker, 44).

The final reaction observed was that of indifference, which may be the result of work colleagues attributing scant importance to the decision, or to its "normalisa-

tion". It might also be due to individualisation, by virtue of which judgment is not passed on personal actions, regarded to form part of each person's private life. The normalisation of such leave was also observed to be attendant upon the existence of precedents, as shown by the replies of the rural police officers interviewed. Taking leave alone could, then, be related to the materialisation of workers' rights, as noted by Ander.

Well, I don't think so. I mean, what I got from everyone was that it was normal, no? I mean, my experience is that it was normal. 'Hey: you on maternity leave?' 'Well yeah', but it's something that, well, I think we've gotten used to pretty much, and at work too, where everyone thought it was completely normal. (Ander, police officer, 35).

In work environments where legal protection is higher, such as in the public as compared to the private sector, acceptance was observed to be more neutral. In the private sector, however, employers were found to be more prone to attempt to alter respondents' initial plans. Such suggestions called for a good deal of security on the part of the respondent and the reassertion of his intention to take a leave alone. That reluctance is a sign of the duality in leave-taking depending on working conditions (García and Ruesga 2014; Alonso and Fernández Rodríguez 2013), as described by Israel.

Yes, I seem to recall that they said... Well, they mentioned taking it part-time so I could work a little and get more out of my day, but... That didn't solve my problem. (Israel, consultant, 43).

7.9 Fathers on Leave Alone: Experience

Fathers' experience of taking leave alone is varied and complex. Two main types of experience can nonetheless be identified among respondents: dependent and independent caregivers. The former are fathers who feel unsure of themselves and express a need for continuous close support from their partners. These fathers would not have taken on the responsibility of sole caregiving if they had not been forced into it by their partner's job circumstances. They would have preferred to take their leave at the same time as their partner and adopt a merely supportive role. After assuming main care provider responsibilities, they reported feeling variably stressed, insecure and overwhelmed, such as exemplified by Daniel.

Well (I was) under enormous stress and kept calling my wife whenever I could to make her nervous as well: 'when will you be home? Are you coming for dinner? Are you going to have time? Are you going to be late?' etc. And not doing anything except waiting for the baby's next move... No, I couldn't relax even for a minute. I have to admit that I was over-anxious the whole time. (Daniel, clerical worker, 44).

On the other extreme, other fathers wanted to be the primary caregivers for their children during their leave. This approach afforded them the opportunity to take full charge as caregivers, a role in which they felt satisfied, sure of themselves, experienced and useful. They found the experience to be a rewarding personal achieve-

ment. Although similar behaviour has been observed in Portugal (Wall 2014), in Spain such independent caregiving could not be, nor was it construed, in most cases as a deconstruction of gender roles, but rather as a new dimension of the father's individual personality.

"Independent caregivers" regarded the mother's participation more as interference than as support. Shared caregiving can ultimately be said to be viewed as a competition to prove who does the better job, although it is primarily the mother who passes judgment on the quality of the father's care. As a result, fathers felt most free, unobserved and unjudged while acting as the sole caregiver, when they found their own space in which they could play the role of father caregiver most fully. David, explained the situation as follows.

More rewarding now than shared (...). At first I felt a little like you don't know what to do or you're a little quote-unquote useless, like I don't know how to change a diaper, and like she did it all, well more naturally. You know? The baby cries, the mother picks him up and he calms down. The father picks him up and it's harder, because you don't know what to do or you feel useless. (...) When she was around it was harder, but now, since I'm alone, I have to get it right no matter what. If the baby cries I have to calm him down. So then when things go well, it's double the satisfaction for me, because I did it alone, with no help. So in self-esteem, I've come out on the winning end, I feel better now than at first. (...) I never imagined I could feel, not jealous, yes, but no, but I would have wanted to say just then 'Hey, I want to be able to do it like that, too' (laughter), but I don't know how. (David, schoolteacher, 35)

When alone, fathers have to perform each and every task involved in caregiving, and in particular the most pressing ones, such as changing diapers, clothing and feeding the baby. Unlike fathers who provide care at the same time as the mother, these fathers cannot shrug off the tasks they find less pleasant or satisfactory. Consequently, fathers who care alone tend to exhibit a full understanding of the many tasks and difficulties involved. Their detailed accounts of the activities undertaken every day denoted a high degree of involvement and were indicative of how effective caregiving alone can be for "socialising" men into that role.

The activities perceived as enjoyable tended to be affective in nature: the child derived pleasure from them and the father's impression was that their emotional bond was strengthened. Two activities that typically fall under this category are strolling and bathing. The latter appears to be particularly pleasurable, especially in the baby's first few months. Here the enjoyment is intensified by the idea that the activity is intimate, creating not only emotional but physical bonding as well.

Bathing especially, because at first I would get into the bathtub and we would put him in with me; it was a wonderful, gentle moment, the actual washing too, and singing to him, the songs that we sang to him a lot. (David, schoolteacher, 35).

As the children grow older, bonding is based less on physical activities (bathing, fondling) than on sharing games or other significant activities, such as nursery school outings or festivities.

The incidents that caused concern and, to a degree, displeasure, were what were perceived as problems that might affect the baby's development: feeding, sleep,

health. Anxiety and stress arose essentially when the child's welfare was uncertain.

After having tried to nurse for months, they were under tremendous stress because the baby wasn't gaining any weight or didn't sleep well. It wasn't so much the task itself as the stress involved, seeing that the baby gained weight. (Carlos, consultant, 49).

Caregiving is sometimes viewed as stressful because of the many tasks involved, which cannot be postponed to allow the father to get enough rest. Here caregiving is seen as an unending series of activities and time as a commodity too scant to enable the father to enjoy what he is doing.

I couldn't say exactly... there's nothing especially difficult. But you do get tired sometimes, I mean especially at first, when the baby needs to be fed every four hours or so. Those first few months are the hardest, the lack of sleep... and if the baby eats well, great, if he doesn't, you worry. I mean, it's more a question... and then during the day you think you're going to have time to do much more and then you don't have time for anything. (laughter) It's true that babies sleep a lot and all, but when you have to do the laundry and, like you have to do the housecleaning. And you get just about enough time to do a couple of things and wham! He wakes up again: the bottle, the whatever, the dirty diaper... and when you've got the baby back to sleep and all, there's another chore waiting, so actually... (Carlos, consultant, 49).

Leave-taking alone is a platform for initiation in caregiving. With that initiation, fathers assume tasks as their own specific responsibility. Significantly, respondents preferred to continue to be involved after their leave came to an end. In other words, the tasks performed while they were the sole caregiver became routine and endured after they returned to work. Such "routinisation" is supported by studies showing that leave-taking intensifies men's participation in childcare (Meil 2013; Fernández-Cornejo et al. 2016; Haas and Hwang 2008). The precedent principle applies here: something done from the outset continues to be done, with any necessary adaptations. Israel expressed it as follows.

Yes, that's it, unquestionably... it's like a... pattern that you fall into from the start and then keep up. I mean, the things you did with them from the get-go you continue to do now, and if before the morning routine was to get up, make breakfast, whatever... well I still do that because the girls... get used to it and they take it better. I mean, it's a pattern we got into from the beginning and we've just kept up. (Israel, consultant, 43).

All the respondents acknowledged that they perceived that they had bonded more closely with their children by spending time with them, a which was consistent with the findings of earlier surveys (Haas and Hwang 2008; Seward et al. 2006). Some fathers even pointed out that being on leave alone helped them create a bond which in men, contrary to women, does not come naturally. Leave-taking was, then, construed as a substitute for the mother's alleged biological advantages for bonding with children. This transcription from Daniel's response is representative.

Yes, yes, no question. Mothers come with that as standard equipment, they have an immortal bond. No? They have a human being in their body, that they bring into the world, and we don't have anything like that, we can't... Then, excepting the obvious differences, for me when I felt that, I thought: this is new. (...) We can't have that with our kids..., but we bond day by day and for me the leave was... well a stroke of luck because now I have bonds with

my daughter almost... well light years away from what her mother has, but much closer than my father had with me. (Daniel, clerical worker, 44).

Significant differences were found between the ex-ante reasons for taking leave and the advantages reported by fathers after the fact. The justification for taking a leave, essentially based on an economic rationale, contrasted with the advantages fathers expressed a posteriori in terms of bonding with their children and becoming "socialised" into caregiving. Consequently, while Becker's (1991) economic rationality would support men's rationale for applying for leave, the theory would not suffice to explain the results. While several fathers failed to mention bonding with their children as one of the reasons for leave-taking, they all found that it was one of the advantages of having done so. "Socialisation" into caregiving and the associated extension of equality in the distribution of these activities proved to be effective. The socialising effect was, then, observed to be more effective among fathers who used the leave for instrumental than among those who did so for affective reasons.

7.10 Conclusions

Although later than in other countries, the dual-earner family model has become the standard in Spain. In line with this change in work-family arrangements, policies have been developed policies to harmonise work and family life which have provided only partial solutions to the problem. Against this societal backdrop, Spanish men's entitlement to childcare leave has been gradually enhanced culminating in 2007, with the introduction of a specific 2-week long paternity leave. While reforms have been justified on the grounds of gender equality, conciliation and the need for men to become more involved in childcare, the idea that fostering the use of caregiving alone as an ideal way of "socialising" men into that involvement has not been addressed in any of the successive legislative reforms. Leave-taking for this purpose is neither encouraged nor hindered. However, a significant number of fathers have taken one or several leave periods alone as part of couples' strategy to harmonise working and family life. It is estimated that over the last 10 years no fewer than 65 000 Spanish men have taken leave to care for their children alone (generally for over 1 month) while their partners return to work.

The reasons given by the respondents in this study for taking leave alone had to do with the partners' social and job situations, the type of leave and the preferred child-raising model. While fathers claimed that they wanted to be near their newborn babies, that desire was not the main motivation for leave-taking. The necessary condition for applying for such leave was, above all, that the father did not fear losing his job in the process. Furthermore, when paid (maternity or nursing) leave was involved, the main reason invoked was that the mother was unable to take advantage of the benefit, reinforced by the belief that it should not be "wasted" and the implicit assumption that during the legal duration of the leave (16 or 18 weeks), babies should be cared for by at least one of their parents. The reasons given for the moth-

er's inability to take the leave were either because she ran her own business that she could not leave unattended, or because she would risk losing her job if she took the leave. In cases of unpaid leave, economic considerations also played a substantial role, but affective reasons and the child-rearing model preferred for children ranked highly in the decision.

With a few exceptions, social and family circles accepted and supported these decisions, and expected no explanation. The workplace reaction was more varied, ranging from surprise to indifference, with an occasional attempt at dissuasion. Contrary to the situation in social and family circles, the workplace atmosphere made fathers feel that they had to justify their decision more frequently, although none of the respondents reported adverse consequences for their careers. While a few sarcastic comments were reported, respondents, who hailed from very diverse work environments, found no open hostility to their decision nor any significant interference, in particular where precedents were in place.

During their leave, fathers reported devoting their time to caring for their babies, viewing the various tasks involved as their own responsibility. They assessed the experience in a positive light, although the level of stress reported varied. We have found two different profiles of fathers: *independent* and *dependent* caregivers. The latter express the need of help from other caregivers and they would prefer to have a complementary role in child care rather than having the main responsibilities while they were alone. By contrast, independent caregivers are able to develop their role of fathers fully when they were alone with their child, since they felt free and unjudged by the partner. In both cases, the main advantages of the experience were that caregiving created bonds that fathers wanted to maintain and develop over time, in addition to the pleasure derived from some of the activities themselves. Respondents deemed that the leave had allowed them to devote time to caregiving, which materialised in specific routines to which they have continued to adhere over time. The inference is that leave so taken contributed to "socialising" men into childcare. The reasons for taking a leave, essentially based on economic factors, contrasted with the advantages fathers expressed a posteriori in terms of bonding with their children and their own "socialisation" into caregiving. The latter experience and its influence on equality in the distribution of these activities may have proved to be particularly effective, among fathers who provided care alone.

The conclusion that may be drawn is that the social barriers preventing men from taking parental leave alone appear to have been worn down over time in Spain, leaving room for more development of their use in the future. The result would be men's greater "socialisation" into childcare, which in turn would contribute to greater equality between the sexes.

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