Spring 2020

Daddy Issues: Why Do Swedish Fathers Claim Paternity Leave at Higher Rates than French Fathers?

Alexa L. Secrest
Gettysburg College

Daddy Issues: Why Do Swedish Fathers Claim Paternity Leave at Higher Rates than French Fathers?

Abstract

The development of paid parental leave programs has become a growing part of national and international dialogues. In particular, the implementation of paternity leave is believed to facilitate women's participation in the workforce, which most Western countries have outlined as an objective. In addition, paternity leave programs are also believed to foster more equitable work environments and challenge gender norms that stereotype women as the primary caregiver. As of 2016, about two-thirds of OECD countries provide some form of both paid maternity, paternity, and combined parental leave ; however, the gender composition of who claims these benefits is still largely skewed in several countries. In France, which has the most elaborate leave system, only 62-66% eligible French fathers take at least part of their offered paternity leave. Furthermore, French fathers only account for 4% of parents who claim parental leave. In Sweden, on the other hand, around 90% of eligible Swedish fathers take at least part of their offered paternity leave, and they account for anywhere from 27 to 45% of parents who claim parental leave. A comparative analysis of five different independent variables - Financial Considerations, Fears of Negative Career Consequences, Breadth and Depth of Maternity Leave, Disinterest, and the Use-it-or-lose is policy - was conducted to determine why French fathers participate in paternity and parental leave programs at significantly lower rates than Swedish fathers. The study concludes that Disinterest, stemming from traditional views on gender roles, is likely the most impactful variable on participation rates. However, Financial Considerations, Fears of Negative Career Consequences, and France's only recently implemented Use-it-or-lose parental leave policy likely exaggerate this disparity. To further investigate this claim, it would be beneficial to more closely examine and compare French and Swedish workplace cultures as well as how each country's religious influence impacts the populations' perceptions of gender roles.

Keywords

Paternity leave, parental leave, France, Sweden

Disciplines

Comparative Politics | Political Science | Social Policy

Comments

Written as a senior capstone in Comparative Politics for Political Science.

Daddy Issues : Why do Swedish Fathers Claim Paternity Leave at Higher Rates than French Fathers ?

Alexa L. Secrest

Department of Political Science, Gettysburg College, Gettysburg, Pennsylvania

Abstract :

The development of paid parental leave programs has become a growing part of national and international dialogues. In particular, the implementation of paternity leave is believed to facilitate women's participation in the workforce, which most Western countries have outlined as an objective. In addition, paternity leave programs are also believed to foster more equitable work environments and challenge gender norms that stereotype women as the primary caregiver. As of 2016, about two-thirds of OECD countries provide some form of both paid maternity, paternity, and combined parental leave ; however, the gender composition of who claims these benefits is still largely skewed in several countries. In France, which has the most elaborate leave system, only 62-66% eligible French fathers take at least part of their offered paternity leave. Furthermore, French fathers only account for 4% of parents who claim parental leave. In Sweden, on the other hand, around 90% of eligible Swedish fathers take at least part of their offered paternity leave, and they account for anywhere from 27 to 45% of parents who claim parental leave. A comparative analysis of five different independent variables - Financial Considerations, Fears of Negative Career Consequences, Breadth and Depth of Maternity Leave, Disinterest, and the Use-it-or-lose is policy - was conducted to determine why French fathers participate in paternity and parental leave programs at significantly lower rates than Swedish fathers. The study concludes that Disinterest, stemming from traditional views on gender roles, is likely the most impactful variable on participation rates. However, Financial Considerations, Fears of Negative Career Consequences, and France's only recently implemented Use-it-or-lose parental leave policy likely exaggerate this disparity. To further investigate this claim, it would be beneficial to more closely examine and compare French and Swedish workplace cultures as well as how each country's religious influence impacts the populations' perceptions of gender roles.

Introduction

In 1974, Sweden became the first OECD country to establish a parental leave program, which allowed both men and women to take time off during and immediately after the birth or adoption of a new child (Moss, 2010). Until this point, leave programs had existed exclusively for new mothers. The European Commission followed Sweden's lead and published Parental Leave Directives for all European Union member states in the 1980s (Moss, 2010). Within the next two decades, all OECD countries save for the United States would offer comprehensive parental leave programs. As of 2017, about two-thirds of these countries also offer some form of paid paternity leave. It is important to note that paternity leave is solely reserved for fathers, whereas parental leave programs are available to both men and women (Background brief on fathers' leave and its use, 2016). Although men have been encouraged to claim parental leave since the programs first debuted, very few did so. In the 1990s, "the average share for fathers' use of parental leave in Sweden :stayed around 10 %, with other countries reporting far lower numbers" (Chronholm, 2007). As such, paternity leave programs were created to increase the likelihood that men specifically would take leave following the arrival of a new child. Indeed, providing father-specific programs has led to an increase in men's leave uptake. For example, Nordic countries have experienced a doubling in the number of parental leave days taken by men since their debut (Parental leave: Where are the fathers?, 2016). Countries which have introduced father-specific programs more recently, such as South Korea, have also experienced significant increases in the number of men claiming leave ; there has been more than a three-fold rise in participation in South Korea since 2007 (Parental leave: Where are the fathers?, 2016).

All OECD countries have outlined improving gender equality as a national objective ; therefore, the development and implementation of paternity leave is considered a sizable step in the right direction. Paternity leave specifically, as opposed to parental leave generally, is believed to foster more equitable home environments, allowing men to assume a more central caregiving role and contribute more to housework. In addition, when paid leave policies exist and are claimed by a substantial portion of eligible men, the short and long-term penalties that new mothers pay in the labor market are mitigated ; women are less likely to scale back their professional commitments or assume part time work when leave is available to their partners (Background brief on fathers' leave and its use, 2016). In the absence of paid leave, "traditional gender roles, and...the lower earnings of mothers (relative to fathers)...create strong incentives for women to reduce their employment and take on a large majority of child care responsibilities" (Background brief on fathers' leave and its use, 2016). Although maternity leave helps women recover from pregnancy and childbirth, and often increases female employment generally, "positive employment effects are strongest when [this] period is relatively short ; taking leave for longer than a year can damage future earnings prospects and make it more likely that people leave the labour force altogether" (Parental leave: Where are the fathers?, 2016). As such, parental leave programs also work to reduce discrimination against hiring women. If both men and women are equally likely to take leave, "employers will be less reluctant to hire women of childbearing-age" (Parental leave: Where are the fathers?, 2016). High possibilities of divorce similarly underscore the importance of women maintaining ties to the labor market and limiting total time outside of paid work (Background brief on fathers' leave and its use, 2016). Paternity leave also aims to provide fathers with the personal fulfillment one

experiences when caring for one's own child, a joy that men are often deprived of due to the pressure to maintain active in the labor market. OECD research demonstrates "fathers who take paternity or parental leave are more likely to perform tasks such as feeding and bathing children" (Parental leave: Where are the fathers?, 2016). In addition, "fathers who care for children early tend to stay more involved as children grow up" and children with more involved fathers "enjoy higher cognitive and emotional outcomes and physical health" (Parental leave: Where are the fathers?, 2016). Lastly, fathers themselves report "greater life satisfaction, and better physical and mental health" when they are more engaged in their children's lives (Parental leave: Where are the fathers?, 2016).

Interestingly, the OECD has found that just as comprehensive paternity leave policies improve a country's gender equality, "poorly designed parental leave policies can actually reinforce... [existing] gender inequality" (Background brief on fathers' leave and its use, 2016). When only women receive long and generous paid leave packages, child care responsibilities are increased for mothers, "while, at the same time, reducing their long-term earnings relative to fathers" (Background brief on fathers' leave and its use, 2016). In addition, if paternity leave programs are poorly paid, social and economic pressures against gender equality are reinforced, as fathers generally earn more than mothers. According to the OECD, "if parental leave does not replace a substantial portion of fathers' earnings, families will bear a greater financial burden when fathers take leave than when mothers take leave" (Background brief on fathers' leave and its use, 2016). Given these findings, the mere creation of paternity leave programs is not sufficient ; they must be both robust and claimed at high rates in order to mitigate gender inequality.

The benefits of paternity leave are supported by social science scholarship as well as biological and neurological research. All existing studies on parent-infant interaction have demonstrated that “parents and their infants need time to establish a pattern of interaction that will enable them to recognize and respond to each other’s signals” (Finn-Stevenson, Hall and Hall, 2002). Through regular parental interaction, infants develop a sense of self and build trust within the family relationship. Such studies have also indicated that these interactions are reciprocal ; parents are just as influenced by their newborns as infants are by their parents' caregiving (Finn-Stevenson, Hall and Hall, 2002). However, continuity is essential for these developments to occur, and it is especially important in the period immediately following birth. Therefore, any time new parents spend at work significantly interferes with parent-infant interaction, and “parents who attempt to compensate for time away...by forcing ‘quality time’ during their hours together may actually become less responsive, ignoring their infants’ social cues and responses, which may cause their infant to withdraw from interaction in an effort to avoid overstimulation” (Finn-Stevenson, Hall and Hall, 2002). Furthermore, research into the biochemistry of stress reactions in young children has indicated that potential stresses are mitigated by a child’s secure attachment to his or her caregivers, one that is first forged in the weeks after childbirth. Lastly, an existing body of neurochemistry and brain physiology data suggest that consistent parent-infant interactions after birth prompt “profound and lasting changes to the actual architecture of the brain and central nervous system [of newborns] ” (Finn-Stevenson, Hall and Hall, 2002). These biological and neurological studies demonstrate the scientific necessity for parental leave, for the welfare of both the mother and father, as well as for their new child.

Despite the vast array of benefits provided by comprehensive paternity leave, the up-take of such programs remains low in most of the OECD countries in which it is offered. Sweden and other Nordic countries serve as the exception to this rule - approximately 90 % of eligible Swedish fathers claim paternity leave, and they take 96 % of the total amount of leave time allotted to them, on average (Duvander and Niklas Löfgren, 2019). In addition, depending on the year, Swedish men comprise anywhere from 27 % to 45 % of parents using parental leave policies (Duvander and Niklas Löfgren, 2019). As most OECD countries strive for gender parity in regards to parental leave participation, Sweden comes remarkably close. Interestingly, France, which is widely recognized as having the most comprehensive welfare system in Europe, reports far lower rates of paternity leave participation. While anywhere from 62 to 66 % of eligible French fathers claim at least part of their offered paternity leave, French men only comprise 4 % of parents using parental leave policies (Boyer and Jeanne Fagnani, 2017). In addition, these low rates have remained stable for the past decade (Parental leave: Where are the fathers?, 2016). Such a gaping disparity begs the question : Why do Swedish fathers claim paternity leave specifically and parental leave generally at higher rates than the French ?

France and Sweden align on an array of factors relevant to this issue, rendering a comparative analysis between their rates of paternity leave participation both possible and informative. First, both Sweden and France are wealthy, developed nations in the OECD. More specifically, France and Sweden both share elaborate welfare systems, as well as a national culture which supports and promotes this system. As Sweden was the first OECD country to implement parental leave, and it is largely lauded as the gold-standard for leave programs, its policies on the subject are viewed favorably by the vast majority of its population as well as by

the international community (Center for Economic and Policy Research, 2008). Although France did not implement paternity leave until 2000, there is widespread support for the program, and in 2017, over 58,000 people signed a petition "demanding men receive more paternity leave following the birth of a child" (Reid, 2020). While this petition did not lead to a change in policy, its public support demonstrates France's acceptance of paternity leave programs. In addition, both France and Sweden have highly centralized governments, as opposed to a federal system like Germany, which allows for a more apt comparison.

Concerning each country's respective leave programs, the OECD identifies Sweden and France as having very high "generosity" and "gender equality" ratings in regards to family leave policies (Center for Economic and Policy Research, 2008). In addition, both France and Sweden offer new fathers approximately the same amount of time for paid leave - 11 and 10 days respectively. Both programs also offer similar ranges of flexibility - French fathers can use these days within "the first four months following birth" while Swedish fathers must use their leave "during the first 60 days after childbirth" (Duvander and Niklas Löfgren, 2019 ; Boyer and Jeanne Fagnani, 2017). Regarding parental leave, France permits both mothers and fathers to take leave until the child is three years old. Time-wise, France's policy is the most generous of the OECD countries. Sweden, on the other hand, allows each parent to take leave until the child is 18 months old. Interestingly, France offers 28 weeks of combined paid paternity and parental leave available only to fathers, the third highest in the OECD, whereas Sweden offers only 10 (Parental leave: Where are the fathers?, 2016). However, French father's still claim leave at consistently lower rates than Swedish fathers. In sum, Sweden and France both possess comprehensive paternity and parental leave programs, both of which receive high ratings from

the OECD. Both countries also share elaborate welfare systems which are used and supported by their respective populations, and they both employ a highly centralized government system. These factors render Sweden and France suitable for a comparative analysis concerning the rates of male participation in family leave programs.

Uptake of Parental and Paternity Leave

Since the development and implementation of paid leave programs, men's uptake has always been substantially lower than that of women, and often fails to reach gender parity. Several explanations have been offered to explain such low rates of participation. Most studies suggest that financial considerations are a powerful factor in regards to taking leave. A variety of political science studies have demonstrated that the best leave programs are not only paid, but well-paid - around half or more of previous earnings (Clarke, Adema and Queisser, 2020). In OECD countries, men still outearn women by around 15% ; therefore, claiming paternity leave would have to make economic sense by replacing a significant portion of their earnings (Clarke, Adema and Queisser, 2020). As such, financial or monetary considerations are a key indicator of participation in paternity and parental leave programs. Similarly, political science research also suggests that most men fear their use of paid leave will lead to negative career consequences ; if they are consistently leaving work to care for their child, they will not be viewed as adequately dedicated to their job (Background brief on fathers' leave and its use, 2016). In this way, when men fear taking leave may prevent professional advancement or reflect negatively on their work ethic, they are less inclined to claim leave. More topical reports, such as recent news coverage and public polling, suggest that men do not claim paternity or parental

leave at high rates due to the breadth and depth of the maternity leave programs offered in their respective countries. As most maternity leave programs range from several weeks to several months long, and are often paid up to 100% of a woman's earnings, fathers simply don't believe it is necessary to stay at home if their partner is able to be there full-time for multiple weeks (Deguen, 2013). These reports suggest that fathers do not consider their presence, as a father, indispensable to the child's first few weeks of life ; as long as a parent, in this case the mother, is able to care for the child full-time, then the other partner is not necessary.

News coverage has also reported men's general "disinterest" in the existence of paid leave options as explanations for low rates of father participation (Deguen, 2013). Despite the recurrence of this variable in select polls, academic scholarship suggests that this "disinterest" is likely caused by societal or cultural norms which promote the idea that caregiving is the mother's job (Background brief on fathers' leave and its use, 2016). Men are less incentivized to claim paternity leave if they consider housework and caregiving as tasks better suited to women or new mothers. Lastly, OECD research suggests that the organization of certain paternity and parental leave systems can have a significant impact on male participation. In particular, programs which reserve "at least some part of the parental leave period as a non-transferable policy for one or both parents on a 'use-it-or-lose-it-policy'" report higher rates of male participation (Background brief on fathers' leave and its use, 2016). In this way, men are more likely to claim leave when the program is more narrowly designed to force a binary choice between father's claiming leave or not claiming leave, rather than allowing them to transfer their allotted time to their partner. In sum, the relevant independent variables to this comparative analysis are as follows : Financial Considerations, Fears of Negative Career Consequences,

Breadth and Depth of Maternity Leave, Disinterest (stemming from traditional views on gender roles), and Nontransferable nature / Use-it-or-lose is policy.

Financial Considerations

Various political science studies as well as OECD research have demonstrated "fathers' use of parental leave is highest when leave is not just paid but well paid" (Clarke, Adema and Queisser, 2020). However, what is considered "well-paid" ? In assessing parental leave policies in 21 countries, the Center for Economic and Policy Research concluded men are less likely to participate in parental or paternity leave programs if "a substantial portion of their income" - around 50% or more - is not replaced (Center for Economic and Policy Research, 2008). As stated, Sweden offers one of the most generous paternity leave programs, replacing "77.6 % of earnings up to a ceiling of $ 34,857.82" (Duvander and Niklas Löfgren, 2019). Sweden's 10 day paternity leave program is financed through the Swedish Social Insurance Agency. Sweden's parental leave program allows "each parent 240 days of parental leave benefit, 195 of which are income-based." These 195 days are also paid at 77.6 percent of earnings, up to a ceiling of $ 46,476.99 (Duvander and Niklas Löfgren, 2019). In addition, of the 240 total leave days, an additional 45 days are paid at the minimum, flat-rate level of $18.39 per day. To qualify for parental leave, one must live and work in Sweden, and earn at least $25.53 per day "for 240 days before the expected date of delivery" (Duvander and Niklas Löfgren, 2019). For those who do not qualify, they are still allowed a flat rate of income related leave totaling $25.53 per day for the entire 240 days of parental leave.

In France, on the other hand, paternity leave programs replace a far lower percentage of the father's income. At first glance, France's policy appears more generous than Sweden's as it claims to replace "100% of net (post-social security contribution) earnings" (OECD Family Database : Parental leave systems, 2019). However, France's paid paternity leave is capped more stringently than Sweden's ; with a maximum benefit of only $93.52 per day. Given these limitations, OECD research suggests that France's eleven day paternity leave program only replaces around 20% of French fathers' incomes (OECD Family Database : Parental leave systems, 2019). Paternity leave is financed from health insurance, as well as from both employees and employers (Boyer and Jeanne Fagnani, 2017). France's parental leave program allows each parent to take leave until the child is three years old, and the related benefit amount "is income-related and dependent on whether the recipient works and, if so, for how long," (Boyer and Jeanne Fagnani, 2017). These benefits are bracketed : those who are unemployed receive $ 426.40 per month, those who work less than half of full-time hours receive $275.65 per month, and those who work 50 to 80 percent of full time hours receive $159.00 per month (Boyer and Jeanne Fagnani, 2017). In this way, the French state subsidizes working men and women who may switch to part time work after the birth of their children, as well as men and women who choose to become stay at home parents. However, it is important to note that these payments can "be made for a maximum period of 24 months to any one parent," signifying that "the remaining 12 months can only be received by the other parent, who must stop employment or reduce working hours" (Boyer and Jeanne Fagnani, 2017). This organization demonstrates an attempt to encourage both mother and father to reduce their hours and stay at home at some point during their child's first three years. The French state also subsidizes families with at least three

children, paying them the equivalent of $ 694.87 per month for one year, as long as one parent leaves the workforce (Boyer and Jeanne Fagnani, 2017). The parental leave program is paid by Family Allowance funds that are part of France's social security system ; however, unlike paternity leave, these funds are only financed through employers, not by employees or one's health insurance (Boyer and Jeanne Fagnani, 2017). To qualify for parental leave in France, one must be registered with the French social security system "least 10 months before the expected date of birth," and one must have worked "at least 200 hours in the three months preceding the date the leave begins" (Parental Leave Rules Explained, 2017). Unlike in Sweden, there is no minimum rate for those who do not qualify.

Given the significant disparity in earnings replacement between French and Swedish paternity leave programs, one is inclined to attribute French men's low leave uptake solely to the Financial Considerations variable. However, a recent policy proposal in Sweden suggests the influence of other, non-monetary factors. In 2008, the Swedish government created a "gender equality bonus" for which couples received five tax-free euros every day for each day they used parental leave equally (Raub et al., 2018). At maximum, this bonus equaled around $1,900 per couple. A year and a half after the program's debut, the Swedish Social Insurance Agency released a review of the policy : out of 8000 families, half of which had a child born before the bonus's introduction and half of which had a child born afterwards, "no difference could be seen between those eligible for the bonus and those who were not" (Sveriges, 2010). According to this study, fathers claimed an average of 44 days of parental leave, while mothers claimed an average of 250 days. The Prime Minister at the time, Fredrik Reinfeldt, defended the equality bonus and suggested "strengthening [its] effect" in order to achieve gender parity in regards to parental

leave uptake (Sveriges, 2010). However, the bonus was retired in 2017 after several more ineffectual years (Lidgett, 2015). To achieve gender parity in uptake of parental leave, Sweden devised a program designed to mitigate the potential financial consequences families may face if fathers claim their share of leave. However, a cash bonus of almost $2,000 yielded no discernible difference in parental leave participation, thereby suggesting that other variables, such as Fears of Negative Career Consequences, Breadth and Depth of Maternity Leave, or Disinterest (stemming from traditional views on gender roles), are at play.

Fears of Negative Career Consequences

Political science research and public polls suggest that many men fear their use of paid leave may lead to negative career consequences. As an OECD backgrounder notes, "absent workers are costly for employers, especially when leave involves more than a few days...taking leave for a long period may be perceived...as demonstrating a lack of commitment to the job" (Background brief on fathers' leave and its use, 2016). Indeed, 30% of French fathers who did not claim paternity leave listed negative work consequences as their primary reason for not doing so. More specifically, 9% feared hurting their relations with their employer, 9% feared leave would be "incompatible with their work", 6% feared slowing down a promotion, and 6% feared losing their job entirely (Deguen, 2013). Despite Swedish father's high rates of paternity and parental leave participation, workplace culture has also factored into whether or not men claim leave, and if so, for how long (Background brief on fathers' leave and its use, 2016). In fact, a 2002 study from *Community, Work, & Family* reviewed the impact of "organizational culture" on men's leave usage in Sweden, finding that leave uptake is "significantly affected" by one's

workplace culture (Haas, Allard and Hwang, 2002). Using responses from a mail survey of 317 fathers in six different companies, the study noted that effects from variables such as fathers' perceptions of support from top managers and fathers' perceptions of work group norms that reward task performance vs. long hours at work were "independent of the influence of individual- and family-level attributes previously acknowledged to affect men's participation in early childcare" (Haas, Allard and Hwang, 2002). In addition, a company's [perceived] commitment to caring values as well as it's [perceived] level of "father friendliness" were both relevant factors in a father's decision to claim leave. Furthermore, if one's workplace is "characterized by direct competition and a lack of solidarity" an eligible father is less likely to take leave (Haas, Allard and Hwang, 2002).

Although Fears of Negative Career Consequences factor into both French and Swedish fathers' considerations, they appear to deter French fathers to a greater extent. As both France and Sweden already guarantee job protection throughout paid parental leave, and both allow for flexible leave arrangements, the typical OECD suggestions to increase uptake do not apply (Raub et al., 2018). However, examining the effects of a father's workplace situation on his leave uptake may offer possible explanations for this difference. A 2006 study from *The Journal of Marriage and Family*, surveying Swedish fathers, concluded that men "working in the private sector, at small workplaces, and in male‐dominated workplaces, are less likely to use parental leave" (Bygren and Duvander, 2006). Sweden employs a larger portion of its population in the public sector when compared with France, at 29% and 21% respectively (McCarthy, 2017). This disparity could, in part, explain why Fears of Negative Career Consequences is more of a deterrent for French fathers. The study also noted that men "at workplaces where other fathers

have not previously used a great deal of parental leave are also less likely to use it" (Bygren and Duvander, 2006).. Therefore, a cycle in which men are dissuaded from claiming leave is established in the private sector, where workplace norms like long hours and constant availability are reported at much higher levels than in the public sector (Haas, Allard and Hwang, 2002). For example, as a company's culture deters eligible men from claiming paternity and parental leave, few men use the offered programs. This low rate of participation is then established as the norm within the company, thereby further discouraging other eligible men from claiming leave. These differences in workplace composition offer some explanation as to why Fears of Negative Career Consequences affect French fathers more than Swedish fathers in regards to uptake of paternity and parental leave. However, it would be beneficial to further investigate these claims. An additional study, positing the existence of a more competitive workplace culture and more heavily gender segregated career tracks in France's private sector, could operationalize these hypotheses for more concrete results.

Breadth and Depth of Maternity Leave

In 2013, France's National Institute of Statistics and Economic Studies (INSEE) published a study investigating the low participation of French fathers in paternity and parental leave programs. Of the surveyed men, 17% responded that "they could have stopped working, but were able to arrange otherwise...because their partner took leave" (Deguen, 2013). It is important to note that this response demonstrates a lack of comprehension in regards to the existence of paternity leave. Paternity leave programs were created for several reasons : to foster more equitable work environments by helping women maintain ties to the labor force, to dispel

traditional gender roles by allowing men a more active role in caregiving duties, and to strengthen bonds between fathers and their children. As previous studies have demonstrated, both children and fathers benefit, both cognitively and emotionally, from each other's consistent, active presence (Finn-Stevenson, Hall and Hall, 2002). Therefore, paternity programs are designed to allow fathers to fulfill the unique role only they possess in their child's life. The existence of such programs suggest that a father's presence, as a father, not just as a general caretaker, is indispensable. As such, when fathers respond that the breadth and depth of maternity leave programs allowed them to keep working, they misunderstand the fundamental objective of paternity leave programs.

However, it is still worthwhile to compare maternity leave programs in both France and Sweden. Is France's program that much more generous than Sweden's, in terms of both compensation and time offered, that it would seem foolish to sacrifice such benefits in order for one's partner to partake in caregiving duties ? In Sweden, mothers are required to take two weeks of maternity leave before or after the child's delivery. During this time, they can opt in to the paid parental insurance benefit offered by the Swedish Social Insurance Agency. As stated, this benefit allows for 195 of 240 days of parental leave to be paid at 77.6 percent of earnings, with a ceiling of $ 46,476.99 (Duvander and Niklas Löfgren, 2019). In addition, 45 of the 240 leave days are paid at a minimum, flat-rate level of $ 18.39 per day. Therefore, maternity leave is not paid in Sweden outside of the parental leave program. However, if a pregnant woman's work is at risk to the fetus and no other work can be made available, she is allowed indefinite leave paid at 77.6 percent of earnings (Duvander and Niklas Löfgren, 2019). Similarly, if a job poses physical challenges and is difficult for a pregnant woman to perform, "the Swedish Social

Insurance Agency is likely to grant eligibility of up to 50 days of leave during the last 60 days of pregnancy, paid at 77.6 percent of income" (Duvander and Niklas Löfgren, 2019). In France, on the other hand, women receive 16 weeks of paid maternity leave, separate from France's parental leave program. Similar to Sweden, women must take at least two weeks of this leave immediately before or after the birth ; however, she can use the remaining 14 weeks as she chooses (Boyer and Jeanne Fagnani, 2017). In France, maternity leave is paid at the same rate as paternity leave : "100% of net (post-social security contribution) earnings" with a daily maximum benefit of around $93.52 per day or about $ 3,520.88 per month (OECD Family Database : Parental leave systems, 2019). As French women earn around 16% less than French men, this number makes up a larger percentage of their income, close to 43% (Gender Pay Gap Statistics, 2020 ; OECD Family Database : Parental leave systems, 2019).

Unlike France, Sweden does not offer a separate maternity leave program with benefits or substantial time off distinct from its parental leave program. However, Sweden's parental leave benefit is more generous than both France's maternity and parental leave programs, replacing 77.6% of earnings for 195 days. France's parental leave benefit, on the other hand, "is income-related and dependent on whether the recipient works and, if so, for how long" (Boyer and Jeanne Fagnani, 2017). OECD research suggests that these benefits, on average, replace arount 13.7% of a French mother's former income (OECD Family Database : Parental leave systems, 2019). Therefore, France's maternity leave program is only more generous when compared to Sweden's on the basis of time. However, as Sweden does not have a distinct maternity leave program, save for two weeks of medically mandated time off, it is not possible to gauge how this variable factors into Swedish fathers' consideration to take leave. It is entirely

possible that France's extensive maternity leave program discourages fathers from taking leave, although the way in which this program is organized may actually work to France's detriment in promoting gender parity regarding leave uptake. As women are granted 16 weeks and men are only granted 11 days, this breakdown may suggest to French families that it is more important for women to take substantial time off. Such an implication may then be carried over to how French couples divvy up parental leave, allotting a far greater percentage to the mother, and little to no time to the father. In this way, France's organization of maternity leave may actually work against the perception that fathers also need time off and instead further entrench traditional gender roles.

Disinterest

According to INSEE's 2013 study, 46% of the surveyed French fathers did not claim paternity or parental leave because they were "not interested" (Deguen, 2013). At first glance, this variable appears difficult to operationalize ; however, studies suggest that this "disinterest" stems from cultural opinions regarding parenting, particularly during the early months of infancy. In most OECD countries, both men and women continue to believe that parental leave should be primarily used by mothers. In fact, the International Social Survey Programme reports "in all but 6 OECD countries at least 50% of people who believe that paid leave should be available to parents also believe that the leave should be taken 'entirely' or 'mostly' by the mother" (Background brief on fathers' leave and its use, 2016). This percentage rises as high as 80% in the Czech Republic, the Slovak Republic and Turkey. Such a perspective aligns with traditional gender roles suggesting that caregiving and housework are primarily the mother's

role, whereas breadwinning is the father's primary responsibility. Both France and Sweden are part of the six OECD countries where less than 50% of people responded that parental leave should be primarily taken by the mother. That said, further investigation reveals that France only narrowly falls into this category, at 48% (Background brief on fathers' leave and its use, 2016). In addition, of this 48%, 15% believe that "leave should be used *entirely* by the mother" (emphasis added) (Background brief on fathers' leave and its use, 2016). In Sweden, on the other hand, only 28% responded that parental leave should be primarily taken by the mother, and of these 28%, only 3% believe leave should be taken entirely by the mother (Background brief on fathers' leave and its use, 2016). Also, 62% of Swedes believe "leave should be split evenly between the mother and father" as opposed to only 40% of the French (Background brief on fathers' leave and its use, 2016).

Such a disparity suggests that traditional gender roles are more prevalent in France than Sweden. Indeed, in a follow-up study, INSEE reported that one in two respondents believe "mothers are better able to respond to the needs and expectations of children than fathers" (Papuchon, 2017). In addition, one-third of respondents believe "different positions held by men and women in private and professional life can be explained as much by biological reasons as by the education they receive" (Papuchon, 2017). These results suggest that gender norms associating housework and caregiving with women's work are strongly embedded in French culture, despite the fact that 48% of the country's labor force is female (Labor Force, Female (% of Total Labor Force) - France, Sweden, 2020). These cultural opinions may be responsible for French men's disinterest in paternity and parental leave. Naturally, if one thinks a task is better suited for his female partner, on the basis of her gender, he will be less likely to perform, or

pursue the time off needed to perform, this task. A 1999 study in *The International Journal of Social Welfare* similarly surveyed Swedish cultural attitudes regarding working women and traditional divisions of labor. Surveying 1988 respondents, 71% of women and 68% *disagreed* with the following statement : "A man's job is to earn money, a woman's job is to look after the home and family" (Sunström, 1999). In addition, 74% of women and 59% of men *agreed* that " A working mother can establish just as warm and secure a relationship with her children as a mother who does not work" (Sunström, 1999). A similar study from 1997 found that Swedish couples noted that "efficiency is more important than the exact and gender neutral distribution of work tasks"(Chronholm, 2007). Although dated, these results suggest that gender roles are far less entrenched in Sweden than in France. A formal inquiry into the causal factors of this difference, such as the government's commitment to gender equality or the religious influence in each country, would be a worthwhile endeavor.

Nontransferable nature / Use-it-or-lose is policy

OECD research suggests that the organization of certain paternity and parental leave systems can have a significant impact on male participation. In particular, programs which reserve "at least some part of the parental leave period as a non-transferable policy for one or both parents on a 'use-it-or-lose-it-policy'" report higher rates of male participation (Background brief on fathers' leave and its use, 2016). This brand of father-specific parental leave, as distinct from paternity leave, is typically called a "daddy quota" and is believed to "to counteract social and economic pressures that otherwise encourage fathers to transfer benefits to mothers" which reduces fathers' role in caregiving responsibilities (Raub et al., 2018). The positive effects of

daddy quotas on men's rates of parental leave participation suggest that fathers are more likely to claim leave when the program is narrowly designed to force a binary choice between father's claiming leave or not claiming leave, rather than allowing them to transfer allotted time to their partner. This approach is considered advantageous for both couples as it allows a father to take leave without affecting his partner's entitlement (Parental leave: Where are the fathers?, 2016). Although OECD research also promotes offering flexible parental leave arrangements, it also notes that "if a portion of leave isn't specifically designated for fathers, few men will take it, reinforcing inequalities at home and at work" (Shand, 2018). In addition, "assigning leave as an individual entitlement for each parent normalizes both men's and women's caregiving...and better supports diverse family structures" (Shand, 2018).

Sweden introduced the "daddy quota" to its parental leave program in 1995, allotting 30 of the 195 paid parental leave days for fathers only (Raub et al., 2018). These days were given on a use-it-or-lose-it basis ; if the fathers did not use them, they would no longer be available. After this policy's introduction, the number of parental leave days taken by men doubled (Parental leave: Where are the fathers?, 2016)). A 2007 Swedish study in Recherches Sociologiques et Anthropologiques noted that "for children born since 1995, 77% of fathers have used at least a portion of parental leave before the child reached 4 years of age" (Chronholm, 2007). In 2002, Sweden doubled the "daddy quota," now reserving fathers 60 days of paid parental leave. This policy change led to "an increased share of parental leave days used by men in the following years" (Chronholm, 2007). Today, Swedish men comprise anywhere from 27 % to 45 % of parents using parental leave policies annually (Duvander and Niklas Löfgren, 2019). France, on the other hand, only recently introduced "daddy quotas," as part of former President François

Hollande's *40 engagements pour l'égalité hommes-femmes*. This bill was voted into law in 2013, but only came into effect for children born after January 1st, 2015 (Atack, Fell, Holmes, and Long, 2019). The new policy allows for "parents of one child who were previously entitled to six months of paid parental leave, a further six months' paid leave was not available for the 'other' parent" (Atack, Fell, Holmes, and Long, 2019). For parents with two or more children, their original entitlement of paid leave until their child's third birthday was left unchanged ; however, each parent is now also allowed "a maximum of only 24 months of leave [including postnatal and maternity leave]...with no possibility of transfer between parents " (Atack, Fell, Holmes, and Long, 2019). As France has only recently modified its parental leave policy to one of a *Nontransferable nature, there are few studies evaluating its impact.* However, a 2015 report from *Caisse des allocations familiales* stated that 78% of families entitled to the new policy "had no intention of sharing the leave" (Atack, Fell, Holmes, and Long, 2019). These results again suggest deeply entrenched gender roles that may take several years to change. That said, the statistic that only 4% of French fathers take parental leave is from 2016 ; therefore, it is possible that this number has risen since France's introduction of the "daddy quota," though no studies have yet been published.

Conclusion

Despite the existence of comprehensive paternity and parental leave in a majority of OECD countries, uptake by fathers is still very low. Sweden is an exception to this rule, as approximately 90 % of eligible Swedish fathers claim paternity leave, and Swedish men comprise anywhere from 27 % to 45 % of parents using parental leave policies. Although France's leave system is comparable in scope and generosity to Sweden's, only 62% to 66% of

eligible French fathers claim at least part of their offered paternity leave, and French men only comprise 4 % of parents using parental leave policies. Why do Swedish fathers claim paternity leave specifically and parental leave generally at higher rates than the French ? Given the highly centralized nature of both France and Sweden's governments, as well as each culture's support for elaborate social programs, such a disparity is worth investigating. The relevant independent variables to this comparative analysis are : Financial Considerations, Fears of Negative Career Consequences, Breadth and Depth of Maternity Leave, Disinterest (stemming from traditional views on gender roles), and Nontransferable nature / Use-it-or-lose is policy.

Financial Considerations likely deter French fathers from taking leave, as France's system only replaces around 20% of a man's earnings, as compared to Sweden's 77.6%. However, a 2008 cash bonus aimed at tempting more fathers to claim parental leave in Sweden largely failed, suggesting that finances are not the sole consideration. That said, the dramatic difference between France and Sweden's replacement rates does likely play a role in French fathers' low participation, as the OECD suggests replacing over 50% or more of a father's income is necessary to increase uptake. Fears of Negative Career Consequences also likely deter French fathers from taking leave. Studies demonstrate that men who work in the private sector are less likely to take leave than those who work in the public sector. In addition, workplaces without a history of parental or paternity leave usage have been proven to deter fathers from claiming leave. Sweden employs a larger portion of its population in the public sector when compared with France, at 29% and 21% respectively. This disparity likely explains, in part, why Fears of Negative Career Consequences is more of a deterrent for French fathers. Examining the

workplace compositions and cultures of both countries would be an interesting avenue to pursue, to further gauge this variable's impact.

The Breadth and Depth of Maternity Programs is not possible to consider as Sweden does not have a distinct maternity leave program, save for two weeks of medically mandated time off. In this way, it is not possible to gauge how this variable factors into Swedish fathers' consideration to take leave. However, it is possible that France's extensive week long maternity leave program discourages fathers from taking leave, as women are granted 16 weeks and men are only granted 11 days. This breakdown may suggest and encourage the idea that it is more important for women to take substantial time off. French men's Disinterest in taking leave, stemming from traditional views on gender roles, is likely the most impactful variable regarding men's uptake of leave. 48% of surveyed French men and women believe leave should be used primarily by the mother, as opposed to 28% in Sweden. In addition, only 40% of French respondents believe leave should be shared equally, as opposed to 62% of Swedes. Such results suggest that gender norms associating housework and caregiving with women's work are still strongly embedded in French culture, and likely account for French men's disinterest in paternity and parental leave. Examining France and Sweden's respective religious histories could shed light on the causal factors behind these different cultural opinions. Lastly, although the Use-it-or-lose-it policy has been demonstrated to increase men's uptake of leave, it was only introduced in France in 2015. As such, it is not yet possible to determine if this variable has greatly impacted men's rates of participation in leave programs. However, 78% of eligible families remarked that they "had no intention of sharing the leave," a statement which suggests the difficulties this program may face due to cultural attitudes regarding caregiving and leave.

In sum, Disinterest stemming from traditional views on gender roles likely plays the most determinant role in French father's low rates of participation in leave programs, as it is a relevant factor to all other variables. However, Financial Considerations and Fears of Negative Career Consequences are also dispositive in determining why French men claim leave at far lower rates that Swedish men.

Works Cited

Atack, M., Fell, S. A., Homes, D., and Long, I. 2019. *Making Waves French Feminisms and Their Legacies 1975-2015*. Liverpool: Liverpool University Press.

2016. *Background Brief On Fathers' Leave And Its Use*. 1st ed. [ebook] OECD, pp.6-17. Available at: <https://www.oecd.org/els/family/Backgrounder-fathers-use-of-leave.pdf> [Accessed 22 January 2020].

Boyer, D. and Jeanne Fagnani. N., 2017. *France: Current Leave And Other Employment-Related Policies To Support Parents*. [ebook] Leave Network, pp.1-6. Available at: <https://www.leavenetwork.org/fileadmin/user_upload/k_leavenetwork/country_notes/2017/France.FINAL.10may2017.pdf> [Accessed 8 February 2020].

Bygren, M. and Duvander, A., 2006. Parents' Workplace Situation and Fathers' Parental Leave Use. *Journal of Marriage and Family*, [online] 68(2), pp.363-372. Available at: <https://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/full/10.1111/j.1741-3737.2006.00258.x?casa_token=RlIA72nb_SUAAAAA%3AcVimu8msOgapabBAusQJnQ-QgiIK4VhZ-E3QbY1vHQ7VLUi7IkMjzys053dzTAjDmSMh2oddZ5ZENS8> [Accessed 22 April 2020].

Center for Economic and Policy Research, 2008. *Parental Leave Policies In 21 Countries : Assessing Generosity And Gender Equality*. Washington, DC: Center for Economic and Policy Research, pp.2-20.

Chronholm, A., 2007. Fathers' Experience of Shared Parental Leave in Sweden. *Recherches sociologiques et anthropologiques*, [online] pp.9-25. Available at: <https://journals.openedition.org/rsa/456> [Accessed 17 March 2020].

Clarke, C., Adema, W. and Queisser, M., 2020. *OECD Yearbook - Organisation For Economic Co-Operation And Development*. [online] Oecd.org. Available at: <http://www.oecd.org/forum/oecdyearbook/what-dads-can-do-for-gender-equality.htm> [Accessed 21 February 2020].

Deguen, F., 2013. *Les Papas Boudent Le Congé Parental*. [online] leparisien.fr. Available at: <http://www.leparisien.fr/societe/les-papas-boudent-le-conge-parental-25-06-2013-2927501.php> [Accessed 17 March 2020].

Duvander, A. and Niklas Löfgren, N., 2019. *Sweden : Current Leave And Other Employment-Related Policies To Support Parents*. [ebook] Leave Network, pp.1-9. Available at: <https://www.leavenetwork.org/fileadmin/user_upload/k_leavenetwork/annual_reviews/2019/Sweden_2019_0824.pdf> [Accessed 17 February 2020].

Finn-Stevenson, M., Hall, N. and Hall, N., 2002. *The First Three Years And Beyond*. 1st ed. Yale University Press, pp.44-64.

Gender Pay Gap Statistics. 2020. Gender pay gap statistics - Statistics Explained. [online]. Available at : https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/statistics-explained/index.php/Gender_pay_gap_statistics [Accessed April 10, 2020].

Haas, L., Allard, K. and Hwang, P., 2002. The impact of organizational culture on men's use of parental leave in Sweden. *Community, Work & Family*, [online] 5(3), pp.319-342. Available at: <https://www.researchgate.net/publication/247516224_The_Impact_of_Organizational_Culture_on_Men's_Use_of_Parental_Leave_in_Sweden> [Accessed 10 April 2020].

Labor Force, Female (% of Total Labor Force) - France, Sweden. 2020. The World Bank. [online]. Available at : https://data.worldbank.org/indicator/SL.TLF.TOTL.FE.ZS?locations=FR-SE (April 6, 2020).

Lidgett, A. 2015. *Sweden Parental Leave Policy To End: Money Bonus For Sharing Parenting Duties Will Stop By 2017, Government Says*. [online] International Business Times. Available at: https://www.ibtimes.com/sweden-parental-leave-policy-end-money-bonus-sharing-parenting-duties-will-stop-2017-2100196 [Accessed April 6, 2020].

Papuchon, Adrien. 2017. *Social Roles of Men and Women. The Enduring Idea of a Maternal Vocation for Women despite the Decline in Adherence to Gender Stereotypes*. Insee. [online]. Available at : https://www.insee.fr/en/statistiques/2660836?sommaire=2661803 [Accessed April 18, 2020].

2017. *Parental Leave Rules Explained*. The Connexion : French news and views. [online]. Available at : https://www.connexionfrance.com/Archive/Parental-leave-rules-explained [Accessed February 26, 2020].

McCarthy, N. 2017. *Scandinavia Leads The World In Public Sector Employment* [Infographic]. Forbes. [online]. Available at : https://www.forbes.com/sites/niallmccarthy/2017/07/21/scandinavia-leads-the-world-in-public-sector-employment-infographic/#84c53a618204 [Accessed April 6, 2020].

Moss, P., 2010. *Improving The Quality Of Childhood In The European Union: Parental Leave Policies*. 1st ed. [ebook] Belgium: Alliance For Childhood, pp.123-136. Available at: <http://www.allianceforchildhood.eu/files/book2010/QOC10%20MossREV.pdf> [Accessed 23 February 2020].

2019. *OECD Family Database : Parental Leave Systems*. [ebook] OECD, pp.3-17. Available at: <https://www.oecd.org/els/soc/PF2_1_Parental_leave_systems.pdf> [Accessed 3 March 2020].

2016. *Parental Leave: Where Are The Fathers?*. [ebook] OECD, pp.1-2. Available at: <https://www.oecd.org/policy-briefs/parental-leave-where-are-the-fathers.pdf> [Accessed 4 March 2020].

Raub, A., Nandi, A., Earle, A., Chorny, N., Wong, E. and Chung, P., 2018. *Paid Parental Leave: A Detailed Look At Approaches Across OECD Countries*. [ebook] Los Angeles: World Policy Analysis Center. Available at: <https://www.worldpolicycenter.org/sites/default/files/WORLD%20Report%20-%20Parental%20Leave%20OECD%20Country%20Approaches_0.pdf> [Accessed 10 March 2020].

Reid, D., 2020. *Tens Of Thousands Of People In France Are Demanding Longer Paternity Leave*. [online] CNBC. Available at: <https://www.cnbc.com/2017/11/01/france-demands-paternity-leave-extension-from-macron-government.html> [Accessed 13 March 2020].

Shand, T. 2018. *The need for fully paid, non-transferable parental leave: Leaving inequality behind and giving our children the care they need.* [e-book] MenCare, pp. 1-6. Available at : https://www.europarl.europa.eu/cmsdata/139328/MenCare-Parental-Leave-Platform-Background-Paper-EU-Parliament-21.02.18.pdf> [Accessed 4 April 2020].

Sunström, E. 1999. Should Mothers Work? Age and Attitudes in Germany, Italy and Sweden. *International Journal of Social Welfare,* [online] 8(3), pp. 193–205. Available at : <https://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/epdf/10.1111/1468-2397.00083> [Accessed April 17, 2020].

Sveriges R. 2010. *Gender Equality Bonus - "Ineffectual,"*[online] Radio Sweden | Sveriges Radio. Available at: https://sverigesradio.se/sida/artikel.aspx?programid=2054&artikel=3578840 [Accessed April 13, 2020].