

Heterogeneous workplace peers effects in fathers' uptake of parental leave in Finland

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Abstract

Increasing paternal participation in early child rearing is seen as a crucial step towards gender equality, as mothers still do the main part of unpaid care work (Atkinson & Bourguignon 2014). Increasingly, family policies are shifting towards encouraging fathers to use parental leave, with the aim of increasing paternal participation during the first years and beyond (Nieuwenhuis & Van Lancker 2020). Yet many fathers, especially those with fewer resources, forgo leave or use less than what they would be entitled to.

This underutilization of paternal leave has prompted research into the factors shaping fathers' leave decisions. While previous studies have explored the impact of policy design and individual socio-economic factors, the influence of workplace peer effects on fathers' choices remains an underexplored area. Workplace peers can significantly influence workplace culture and social norms, which, in turn, may affect fathers' willingness to take parental leave. The scant tradition of earlier studies have shown mixed results: findings from Norway by Dahl et al. (2014) suggest that workplace peers are important for fathers' leave uptake while Tallås Ahlzén (2022) found no support to the importance of peers in Sweden.

In our study, we seek to uncover the direct and cumulative total effects of workplace peer dynamics on Finnish fathers' parental leave uptake after the 2013 parental leave reform, which was the first to give Finnish fathers an independent right to a quota of parental leave. Specifically, we focus on father's quota of parental leave that is intended to be taken after the mother has returned to work, as this type of leave should be the most effective in influencing the gendered patterns of childcare.

Preliminary findings, using structural causal models (Pearl, 2009) and Bayesian logistic regression, suggest that workplace peer effects influenced Finnish fathers' decisions. Low-educated fathers were more impacted by their peers' decisions than highly educated fathers were: peer effects were approximately nine percentage points for first-time fathers with basic or upper secondary education and five percentage points for first-time fathers with tertiary degrees. Higher-parity fathers were slightly less impacted than first-time fathers were (by 1–2 percentage points).

References:

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