

MEN ON PARENTAL LEAVE IN HUNGARY

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Abstract. It is no wonder that nowadays the reconciliation of work and family is also getting highlighted in social studies. For a long time, these studies concentrated on young mothers; however, researchers have realized that the dual challenge of work and family proves difficult to men as well. It is not unheard of in Hungary that fathers go on so-called child-care or “paternity” leaves: mostly for family commitments, they leave the labour market and take care of their children at home. To analyze this phenomenon, we conducted quantitative and qualitative researches in 2011, the results of which are published mostly in the following article.

Keywords: reconciliation of work and private life, fathers on child-care leave, family roles, division of labour within the family, fathers and mothers.

Jel classification: J13

1. Introduction

The reconciliation of work and family life is becoming more problematic for individuals as well as organizations. While this problem was primarily viewed as one involving mostly women when it became a public issue 40 years ago, by the 80s, management-researches had already begun to involve men, and their points of view were integrated in the research of harmonizing family and labour commitments.

As the labour market primarily employs and caters for men, with all the inherent advantages (like higher wages for the same job) and disadvantages (like longer working hours) (Spéder 2011), it is no wonder that the stronger labour-market presence and activity of women also changes the traditional family roles.

Among other things, this process can be observed within the field of child-care: either for real commitment or material reasons, more and more fathers decide to go on child-care leave for a shorter or longer period of time, causing a break in their careers and even becoming inactive in the labour market.

Although child-care leave was initially invented for women, as the fathers' role in child-care was receiving public attention, new versions of the original child-care leave were designed for men. Sweden, for example, was the first country in the world where men's right for child-care leave was legislated – as early as the 70s (Rostgaard 2002). It was also the second country after Norway where a

special form of paternity leave was designed at the beginning of the 90s.

Since child-care leave became parental leave, that is, parents could share this form of absence among themselves, a new form of paternity leave has appeared which entitles fathers to a special leave right after the birth of their child. (Korintusiné 2008). Only fathers are entitled to this form of leave.

The general trend today is that families go not only on maternity and parental child-care leave, but also on paternity leave. In this respect, there are marked differences between EU-members in terms of who is entitled to it, as well as what exactly people are entitled to. It is also true, however, that there has been a Directive on European Parental Leave since 1996, the aim of which is to encourage both parents to take this opportunity, staying at home for at least 3 months as a non-transferable right, at least until the child reaches the age of 8.

However, Moss (2008) shows that according to researches, fathers typically take this form of leave when it is offered specifically to them, and only when it also involves high remuneration, while the same men are reluctant to take a form of absence with low or no payment.

Fox-Pascall-Warren (2009, with reference to Brandth 2004) claim that father-friendly policies presume that fathers' involvement in child-rearing reduces tension between work and private life, while also balancing the proportion of unpaid work done at home by fathers and mothers. At the

same time, it is also a fact that it is not a general European practice to motivate fathers to stay at home and take part in child-rearing.

As this topic is becoming timely and important, it is no accident that we conducted qualitative, as well as quantitative, researches along this line in the second half of the year 2011. Our aim was to reveal the practice of child-rearing through paternity leave in Hungary, together with its social acceptance, organisational and family trends and its impact on family relationship. It is some aspects of our wide-ranging researches that we are presenting in this essay, proving the basic hypothesis appearing below. However, before making our hypothesis statement and collecting evidence, it would be worth having a look at the available literature, with special regard to previous Hungarian findings.

2. Some words on Hungarian practices

The so-called father-friendly employment policies appear in Hungary first and foremost in the form of special absence opportunities and attached benefits. Hungarian subsidies created to protect families and children (including absence benefit forms) amount to a great percentage of the social security expenses as well as the GDP; in fact, the expenses are higher than the European average. Based on the data from the Central Statistical Office (KSH) social expenses used for family protection amounted to an average 7.8 %-8.3 % of all social expenses in the European Union between 2000 and 2007. The average Hungarian percentage in the same period was 11.8 %-13.2 %.

At the same time, however, the different governmental policies still failed to provide equal opportunities of child-rearing for men and women. As Gyarmati (2008) points it out, the present economical state influences the quality of family support systems. Since budgetary legislation brings about the change of social legislation, the family support system also changes regularly, which reduces predictability and stability for individual families.

It is still relatively rare for men to stay at home with their children as opposed to the practice of some EU-members; in Sweden, for example, approximately 17 % of males decided to take this opportunity in 2004 (Drew 2004).

Hungarian statistical figures show that the proportion of child-care leaves between men and women has barely changed in the past few years, with the number of men on child-care leave falling far behind that of women.

According to the Central Statistical Agency, there were altogether 268 000 people between the

age of 15 and 61 who took child-care leave; this is 11.9 % of the inactive population. At the same time, the 2011 data of the National Health Insurance Fund Administration (OEP) showed that only 5-6 % of the families with young children choose the possibility of having the father stay at home and take care of the children, which means that only 1 % of those taking child-care fee (*gyed*) were male. Those entitled to maternity – or rather, paternity– benefit (*gyes*) amounted to a somewhat higher, 5 % in 2007 because current legislation allowed people to work while receiving this benefit (maximum 6 hours). This means that couples have to consider which one of them takes this opportunity; they usually decide based on taxation considerations. We can assume based on statistical data that only a really small portion of Hungarian families think that it is the fathers who should stay at home.

The timely nature of this question is also shown by the fact that it is also dealt with by the media and political organizations. Last year, the European Parliament, among others laws, accepted the governing principle of granting 14-20 weeks of child-care leave for mothers; at the same time, the representatives also supported the introduction of an at least two-week long non-transferable paternity leave (92/85/EEC governing principle, article 8a).

Although the Hungarian practice of granting child-care leave for fathers is considered to be advanced compared to some other EU-members, there have been older and newer steps; among other things, the coalition partner of the present right-wing government has suggested that child-care leaves should be more equally distributed among the two genders, especially in the early stages of childhood.

Moreover, at the time of writing this article, a governmental suggestion is being discussed, according to which, child-care leave and all its grants and benefits can be entitled to fathers in the future, provided the mother cannot take care of the child due to death or illness. There are several foreign researches (Fatherhood and Health Outcomes in Europe 2007, Reconciliation of Work and Private Life 2005) looking for answers as to why families decide that the father should go on child-care leave. However, it is a fact that the researches of Zsuzsanna Blaskó (2005) indicated in Hungary that by 2002, both genders begun to accept the notion that “there is a natural need to work” among women, which does not necessarily affect the family in a negative way.

While the financial situation of Hungarian families means that women cannot afford not to work and contribute to the family budget, the tra-

ditional gender roles continue to survive in the society even after the change of the communist regime. The notion of the traditional division of labour within the family is primarily supported by the social levels with lower education. As it is supported by international researches (Pongrácz 2005), Middle- and Eastern-European countries – with the Hungarian society among them – still considers the traditional family roles ideal, which is a popular notion even among people under 30 or people with higher level of education. It is no wonder then that only 45 % of those questioned in Hungary in 2003 could fully accept the situation of “the father staying home and the mother making money.”

The strong presence of the traditional Hungarian roles can be justified by the European time-scale researches, which showed that the Hungarian women spent more time with child-caring and housework than men: as opposed to the 28 hours per week for women, the same figure for men was only 11 hours.

There can be several obstacles for a family to make the rational decision of the father staying at home with the child. Olga Tóth sociologist (2004, referred to by Wholgemuth) claims that the basic obstacle is the still lower salary of women. The figures of the wage indicator in 2006-2007 show that the difference between the wages of the two genders was 17.7 % in the given period. At the same time, Turóczy (2010) calls attention to the fact that this difference can become more marked in the case of women with children: the 2008 figures show that the difference in wage between men and women at the same job after their first childbirth was 14 %, while the difference became 25 % after the second, 26 % after the third child.

Although traditional roles are still strong in the mind of the Hungarian society, there are also new roles expected not only from women, but also from men.

It turns out from the 2009 KSH-statistics that the public opinion creates two sets of requirements towards men. The traditional notion of money-maker is still strong; however, society expects men to take part in child-rearing as well. This means that the ideal stance would be a joint role of the modern and the traditional notions of fatherhood. At the same time, Zsolt Spéder, the leader of the researches (p. 224) hints at: “two homogenous sets of expectations, that is, the exclusively modern or traditional view is also present, albeit to a lesser degree.”

Although there is such an expectation towards fathers, it is still not widespread to actually see them taking part, or, rather, being able to take part, in child-rearing.

The Hungarian practice shows that the father’s role in child-rearing becomes a bigger issue after the pregnancy and child-bed support (*tyűs*) expires. There is no upper limit to *tyűs*, which is currently 70 % of the gross salary of the mother, and, as we have already indicated, can be taken only by mothers in Hungary. A father may only take *gyed* (which is a conditional right) or *gyes* (which is a subjective right). At present, *gyed* is also 70 % of the salary; however, it has an upper limit too. While *gyed* does not normally allow simultaneous work, the practice of *gyes* is that although it does not allow work until the child is at least 1 year old, after that, maximum 6 hours of work is allowed for both genders.

Besides the above mentioned factors, there has been a 5-day-long period of paid time off work in Hungary since 2002 as a form of paternity leave. This is an opportunity that fathers may take any time before their child is two months old, and which the employer is obliged to grant them. This is a benefit available not only to the biological, but also to the adopting father. Fathers in this period receive a special absence fee financed not by the employee but by the Hungarian State Treasury.

3. Research process, methods and results

As we could see, it is not a widespread practice in Hungary for fathers with young children to stop work for longer or shorter periods of time, thus becoming inactive in the labour market. We conducted a quantitative, as well as a qualitative, research this year the characteristic features of the Hungarian society regarding this issue. We conducted a secondary research, that is, we studied the available literature and previous observations, based on which we managed to make the following hypothesis:

Hypothesis 1

Those interviewed during our research cannot accept that fathers may stay at home with their child; moreover; they have a negative opinion about men and women who accept this arrangement.

In our present research, we examined the validity of our hypothesis based on our research conducted this year.

In our research, we attempted to reveal the current Hungarian practice, while also trying to draw conclusions concerning cause and effect structures. For this reason, our research consists of two parts. We made a qualitative research (through deep interviews) in the summer of 2011 to

approach the problem, followed by a quantitative questionnaire in the summer and autumn to reveal cause and effect relationships. With regard to the amount of our research, we are only introducing the results concerning our hypothesis.

Our qualitative research consisted of a deep interview, during which, we only interviewed couples where the father took the opportunity of *gyes* or *gyed*. There were altogether 7 Hungarian couples, 5 of whom lived in Budapest, 2 in PestCounty: this means that all families lived in the most developed region of the country, Central Hungary. Although the sample was not great and the research cannot be considered representative, it gave a suitable framework to this issue.

The questions asked from the couples were grouped into 4 categories. The first part of the interview revealed the couple's life previous to childbirth, from becoming a couple through living together to career at work. The second set of questions considered the period of pregnancy, when the couples already knew that they are going to have a child. Here, we were mostly interested when and how the decision that the father should stay at home was made. We also wanted to know how the employers of the couple took this decision. The third group examined the period immediately after childbirth, the question of labour division and possible changes of roles from the time the couple took joint care of the baby to the time the father stayed at home with the child after the mother had returned to work. Finally, we also examined the period after the mother went back to work: how their relationship changed because of the new situation, and how they judged their decision concerning the development of the child and their emotional and career development. During the 1 hour long interview, we asked the men and women separately, which means their presence did not influence the others' answers.

This deep interview research allowed us to draw several conclusions. Concerning our hypothesis, the deep interviews revealed that the couples questioned shared child-care tasks primarily for financial, and only secondarily for emotional considerations. As for the development of the child and the emotional strength of their relationship, all couples considered their decision to be positive, that is, they believed that the atypical division of labour and the partial restructuring of family roles made their relationship stronger; their answers suggested mutual cooperation and support. On the other hand, their immediate surroundings usually found it strange or completely failed to understand why these families made this decision. Not only the older but also their own generation expressed their disapproval, especially in

terms of the possible negative effects on the development of the child. They also considered the mothers to be opportunistic, who put their career first. The fathers also received negative criticism from their immediate friends, claiming that they would lose their authority within the family or that they would become financially vulnerable.

The summary of the research was that although the couples themselves did not regret their decision of making the father stay at home with the child, they all had to face social prejudices.

In spite of the fact that all 7 interviewed couples considered their decision to be the right one, it turned out that social expectations still prefer the traditional roles, which strongly hinder a more modern approach from the couples.

Based on our qualitative research, we managed to launch our quantitative one as well.

Of all the primary measuring scales during the quantitative research, we mostly used the nominal scale; we used the ordinal scale in the case of one question; as for the metric scales, we used interval scales, more precisely, the 5 point Likert scale. We evaluated the results using the SPSS 17-version.

Our methods of evaluation were one-variable methods on the one hand, on the other hand, we utilized multiple-variable ones like cross-table analysis, independent-samples T test, one-way ANOVA and binominal logistic regression.

We managed to collect 290 samples during the research; our chosen non-random sampling technique was the snowball method. The samples are not representative, but they do give an overall picture.

During the creation of the questionnaires, we attempted to approach the issue from several different angles, so, among others, the questions included: the reconciliation of work and private life, the division of labour in the family, the acceptance of traditional roles and, naturally, the situation when the father stays at home on child-care.

We begin the introduction of the results with the specification of the sample.

As for regional diversification, 95.5 % of our sample comes from the three most developed regions of the country: 29.7 % from Central Hungary, 19 % from Central Transdanubia and approximately 47.2 % from West-Transdanubia. The remaining 4.1 % of the sample came from the three least developed regions of the country, which makes the whole sample nationally non-representative. Our future goal is to include those regions in the research which are currently under-represented.

Regarding the gender division of those questioned, 40.3 % of all the people were men and 59.7 % were women. As for age categories,

72.4 % of those questioned were under 40, and with regard to the whole sample, approximately 57.2 % of them were between the ages of 19 and 30. We can say the sample contained mostly those to whom child-bearing and child-rearing was a timely issue, or it was going to become one in the near future. 46.9 % of those questioned had secondary educational degree, 41.7 % had tertiary degree, while about 11.4 % only finished primary or vocational school.

64.8 % of the sample had no children while 16.4 % did, but they were over 18; 10.1 % were

rearing 1, 5.6 % 2, 2.4 % 3 and, finally, about 0.7 % were rearing 4 or more children.

To prove our hypothesis, the first part of the questionnaire aimed at finding out the responders' view of the traditional family roles. For this reason, we made statements which the responders had to answer on a 5 point Likert scale to show how much they agree with it. The 'completely disagree' answer was point 1, while the 'completely agree' was point 5.

The statements and the attached averages and dispersions are summarized in the following table:

Table 1. The Acceptance of Traditional Family Roles among Responders

Description	N		Mean	Std. Deviation
	Valid	Missing		
Career and family are not reconcilable for a woman today.	288	2	2.68	1.217
Career and family are not reconcilable for a man today.	285	5	2.34	1.254
The basic family role for men is to support the family.	289	1	3.41	1.216
The basic family role for women is to rear children and do the housework.	288	2	2.92	1.188
It is not the men's duty to do housework.	287	3	2.11	1.113
Women always have to put family before career.	286	4	3.00	1.270
Men always have to put family before career.	288	2	2.64	1.169

The table shows that men's role as family supporters is still strong among the questioned; however, the situation is not so clear concerning traditional female roles. At the same time, the interviewees claimed that men can reconcile their work with their family commitments. The interviewees were also more lenient with men – possibly as a result of their role as family supporter – when they put their career before their families. The table also shows that men's participation in housework is an existing demand. Naturally, we should not forget that we should count on a low level of dispersion in the case of all variables, which means that responders were not consistent with their answers.

We were curious how averages differ in terms of gender, age and education. To make the research more interpretable, we reduced the education variables, thus re-coding them, getting 3 categories instead of the original 6. We differentiated between primary, secondary and tertiary education, similarly to the age categories, with 3 categories of under 30, between 30 and 50 and over 50.

We conducted the researches with one-way ANOVA and independent-samples T-test. Regarding the differences in the two genders' answers, there was a significant difference during the inde-

pendent-samples T-test, in connection with the justification of traditional female roles. To be precise, the acceptability of the "family supporter role of men"-variable proved to be t test: 2.105 sign.: 0.036 $p < 0.05$, while the "women's duty is child-rearing and housework"-variable was t test: 2.894 sign.: 0.004 $p < 0.05$. There was a similarly significant difference in opinion concerning the variable "men do not have to do housework" (t test: 2.388 sign.: 0.018 $p < 0.05$). In our research, men were more firmly fixated on the traditional male and female roles than the women themselves. This is probably due to the fact that women are much more present in the labour market than before, and their bigger labour commitment makes them expect their partners to take a bigger share of the housework too. We examined whether we could find any difference in the answers regarding age or education, but we could not find any significant differences in these instances.

Based on the fact that the sample showed a more or less solid acceptance of the traditional roles – especially concerning the family supporting role of men – we spent the next stage trying to find out how willing the responders are to accept a more innovative division of labour; basically, how

willing men are to go on child-care leave and rear the children at home.

Approximately 70.9 % of those questioned agreed with our statement that the father should stay at home. We used a cross-table analysis to check the dispersion of opinions based on the already mentioned gender, age and education factors. 65.8 % of the men questioned agreed with the father's decision to stay at home, while the same figure in the case of women was 74.4 %. The chi-square did not show a significant connection between the gender variable and the proportion of agreement: Pearson chi-square = 2.502 sign.: 0.114p > 0.05. As for the age variable, approximately 70 % of those under 30 would accept the father to stay at home, and, interestingly, so would 71,3 % of those over 50; the chi-square showed that there is no significant correlation between the age and the level of acceptance. Regarding education, people with a higher degree could accept easier that the father should stay at home with the children – approximately 81.7 % - while those opposing this idea mostly finished primary education level only (42.4 % of them did not agree with this statement). These results reinforce the results of previous researches, which suggests that in the

Hungarian society, people with lower education support traditional roles stronger than those with higher education. The chi-square showed a significant connection between education and the level of acceptance regarding fathers who stay at home with their children: Pearson chi-square=12.119 sign.: 0.002 p < 0.05.

Besides finding out whether the responders could accept a father on child-care leave, we were also interested in their opinion about those men and women who make this decision. In the first part of the examination, we focused on the responders' opinion of the fathers. Approximately 90.9 % of the answers were not negative towards these men. We checked the results with binomial logistic regression, and we found that based on the Wald-statistics (Wald: 5.220 sign: 0.022 exp(B):2.629p < 0.05) there is a 2.629-times greater chance for women not to judge these fathers than for the male responders. As for the fathers' description, we made statements which the responders were supposed to react to on a 5 point Likert scale, just like in the earlier case.

The results are summarized in the following table:

Table 2. Opinions of Responders Concerning Men on Child-Care Leave

Description	N		Mean	Std. Deviation
	Valid	Missing		
I consider those men who go on <i>gyes</i> or <i>gyed</i> unmanly.	286	4	1.86	1.246
I consider it exemplary if a man goes on <i>gyes</i> or <i>gyed</i> instead of his partner.	286	4	3.25	1.300
If a man goes on <i>gyes</i> or <i>gyed</i> , he must part with his career.	286	4	2.13	1.134
I think a man who goes on <i>gyes</i> or <i>gyed</i> loses his authority in the family.	286	4	1.88	1.168
If a man goes on <i>gyes</i> , he loses his financial independence and becomes vulnerable to his partner.	286	4	2.57	1.399

The average answers show that the responders have a favourable, almost positive, attitude towards those fathers who decide to stay at home with their children.

We examined whether we could find differences in opinion based on age, gender or education. Again, the examinations were conducted through one-way ANOVA and independent-samples T test. The T test examinations proved that there were significant differences in the case of all questions raised in table 2 based on gender: women were always more lenient towards fathers who stayed at home than men. At the same time,

neither the age, nor the education variables yielded similarly significant differences.

We examined how the responders saw those women whose partners went on child-care leave instead of them. Approximately 91% did not judge these women unfavourably. We would have used binomial logistic regression to see whether the gender variable played a role in negative judgements but the gender independent variable did not have any significant effect (Wald: 2.232 sign:0.135 exp(B):1.855p > 0.05).

The responders also had to value mothers on a 5 point Likert scale. The following table contains the result of those questions:

Table 3. Opinions Concerning Mothers, Whose Partner Goes on Child-Care Leave

Description	N		Mean	Std. Deviation
	Valid	Missing		
A woman always has to choose between her career and her family.	285	5	2.72	1.283
I do not consider a woman whose husband goes on <i>gyes</i> or <i>gyed</i> instead of her to be a good mother.	285	5	1.93	1.133
It is not good if a man makes less money in the family than his wife.	283	7	2.99	1.368
I think women whose husband goes on <i>gyes</i> make a sacrifice for their family.	283	7	2.80	1.359

The answers show that there is no negative attitude towards mothers, and responders seem to consider women's new roles as a necessary evil instead of cases of bad mothers.

As earlier, we examined the differences in opinion based on gender, age and educational variables.

According to the independent-samples T test, men and women proved to be significantly different in their opinion whether they consider these women to be poor mothers (t test: 2.951 sign.: 0.003 $p < 0.05$). In these questions, the male responders judged these mothers more harshly than the female ones. Also, males agreed more firmly with the assumption that it is not a good thing when the husband makes less money than the wife. (t test: 2.377 sign.: 0.018 $p < 0.05$). At the same time, we could find no definite correlation between the statements made in table 3 and the age groups and education level of the responders.

4. Conclusions

The hypothesis which we made in this article was examined by us through qualitative, as well as quantitative, means. The deep interviews were based upon the experience of the families involved in the questionnaire, and they showed that the Hungarian society is not particularly accepting towards those families where the father wilfully stays at home with the children. At the same time, our quantitative research shows that although the traditional family roles are strongly accepted in society, there are signs among women pointing towards a more modern approach. It is true, then, that the acceptance of traditional roles is still strong in men.

On the other hand, the more modern approaches are also present as people usually accept a situation in which the father goes on *gyes* or *gyed*; also, the majority of people do not judge those men and women who decide to switch roles so that the father can stay at home with the child. This means that our quantitative research did not support the hypothesis we made earlier in this article. Even the

multiple-variable tests showed that women were more tolerant towards those fathers and mothers, who decide that the male spouse should go on *gyes* or *gyed*. This phenomenon may be explained by the fact – as shown by our own researches – that men can identify themselves with more traditional roles a lot easier, even in modern days.

It is also a fact, however, that although 49.8% of those who filled out our questionnaire would try a change of traditional roles if they were given the chance, this willingness is more like a plan or dream, and it remains to be seen when the relevant Hungarian figures will approach those of the Scandinavian countries.

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