

Working Fathers in Europe: Earning and Caring?



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Background

A common conception of modern fatherhood is that there has to be a trade off between a father either being a financial provider or an active carer. Drawing on an analysis of large-scale European survey data, which is both longitudinal and comparative, this study explores the possibility that a father's success and commitment as a financial provider does not necessarily prevent a similar commitment to the caring and nurturing aspects of fathering (Marsiglio 1995).

In this study, earnings of co-residential fathers and non-fathers are compared in order to examine whether fathers who spend more time looking after their children work fewer hours and earn less than other fathers and non-fathers, for the period 1994 to 2001, in fourteen European countries.

Combining Parental Care and Parental Financial Commitments

As a man enters into parenthood, we might expect to see changes in his ability and willingness to do paid work as well as changes to the effort and time he devotes to domestic work. A father's labour market outcomes are expected to differ from those of a non-father. He might be more inclined to work longer hours and be more ambitious as part of an effort to better provide financially for his new family, thus offsetting the increased costs of becoming a parent. Conversely, he might reduce his working hours and place greater emphasis on his domestic life as part of an effort to spend more time caring for his family.

Two such competing strategies of co-residential fatherhood are found in the literature, namely that of the "good provider" and that of the "active father" (Kaufman and Uhlenberg 2000). This study looks beyond this simplistic dichotomy of fathers who provide versus fathers who care and considers whether some fathers actually manage to do both.

Study Aims and Methods

The findings are based on analyses of panel data from the European Community Household Panel (ECHP). The ECHP is a particularly unusual data source since it is both longitudinal and comparative. Through repeat annual interviews, this longitudinal survey follows men in the context of the households within which they live, for the eight years from 1994 to 2001. The survey provides information on time spent by respondents looking after children as well as rich socio-economic contextual information. The analysis focuses on a representative sub-sample of all working men, employed and self-employed, across the European Union. Results are reported for resident social fathers, i.e. men who are living in a household with dependent children for whom they care, regardless of their legal or biological connection to the child.

One of the limitations of much survey-style research is that it gives a snapshot of the social context being studied at one time only. Using only cross-sectional data it is not possible to track changes over time or to identify the cause-and-effects of, for example, becoming a father. Longitudinal panel studies are an attempt to respond to this problem. In such studies, the same sample of the population is surveyed at regular intervals, so that any changes over time can be measured and reported. By observing the same people each time, we can be sure that any changes we observe are not due to differences between these individuals but rather to the individuals themselves having changed over time in relation to the phenomena we are trying to measure, in this case, becoming a father.

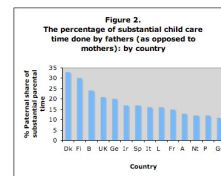
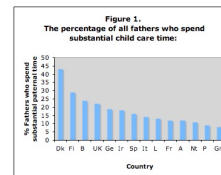
Father Friendly Policy Index

- ♣ Father-friendly policy enables fathers to spend more time looking after their children
- ♣ Fathers in countries with more father-friendly provision generally spend more paternal time (with exceptions)
- ♣ Gender-neutral "parental" policies are less effective than policies specifically targeted at fathers

For more see: Smith, A. J. and Williams, D. (2007) "Father Friendly Legislation And Paternal Time Across Western Europe" *Journal of Comparative Policy Analysis* 9 (3) (forthcoming).

Key Findings

- ♣ While mothers across Europe still spend more time caring than fathers, there are considerable cross-national differences in father's participation in childcare.
- ♣ Fathers in the Nordic countries spend the most childcare time and fathers in Greece and Portugal spend the least.



- ♣ Estimates constructed using the European Community Household Panel (for 1996).
- ♣ Substantial childcare time is defined as more than 28 hours per week.
- ♣ Children are under six years old.
- ♣ The countries for which data are available include: Belgium (B), Denmark (DK), France (FR), Germany (Ge), Greece (Gr), Ireland (Ir), Italy (It), Luxembourg (L), The Netherlands (Nl), Portugal (P), Spain (SP) and the United Kingdom (UK).

- ♣ There are considerable gender gaps in the amount of time parents spend looking after their children. Fathers spend between 11% and 33%, in Greece and Denmark respectively, of the total amount of substantial parental childcare time.
- ♣ On average, fathers across Europe earn more per hour than non-fathers, but they do not work longer hours.
- ♣ In the couple of years prior to becoming fathers, fathers-to-be are already earning more per hour than other non-fathers.
- ♣ On average, fathers who spend more time with their children also earn more per hour and work fewer hours than those fathers who spend less time with their children.

Policy Implications

That fatherhood and labour market outcomes are intrinsically linked has significant policy implications:

- ♣ Reducing the number of hours that a father works, whilst increasing his hourly wage rate, creates a father who is both a good financial provider and an active carer.
- ♣ Pre-fathers and other non-fathers are not the same in terms of their labour market outcomes. Becoming a father is positively associated with a man's labour market situation. Thus, labour market outcomes appear to be linked to male fertility.

For more:

For more information on:

European Fathers and the Time they Spend Looking After Their Children

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References:

- Kaufman, G. and Uhlenberg, P. 2000. "The Influence of Parenthood on the Work Effort of Married Men and Women", *Social Forces*, 78 (3): 931-949.
- Marsiglio, W. 1995. *Fatherhood: Contemporary Theory, Research, and Social Policy*, London: Sage.