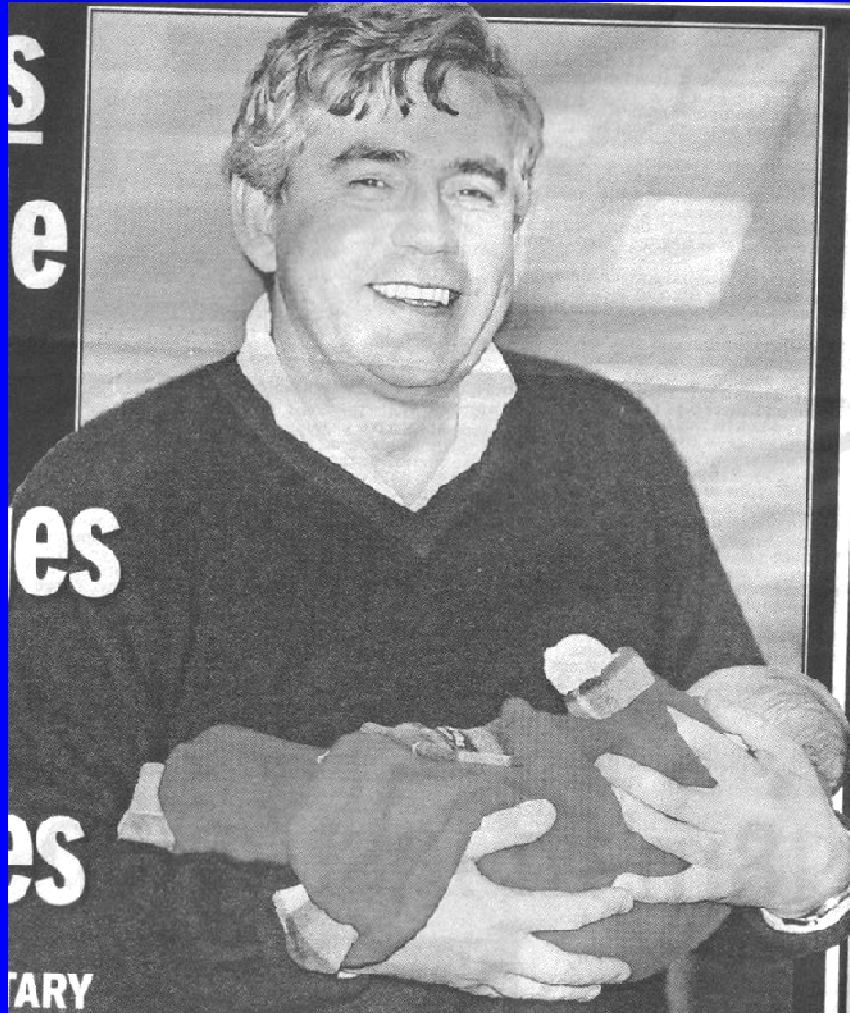


**Leave policies for mothers and
fathers: children's well-being &
perspectives**

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Children's perspectives

Parental leave and infant quality of life



Taking children's perspectives

- From late C20 children, as a generational group, have become active players/ stakeholders in the policy making process (*UN Convention of the Rights of the Child 1989*)
- In the parental leave policy arena, adults act as *advocates* for the infant and for *the infant quality of life model* they wish to promote.
- *“The Government wants children and young people to have more opportunities to get involved in the design, provision and evaluation of policies and services that affect them or which they use”* (Children and Young People's Unit, UK, 2001).

Infant quality of life models

- Specifying indicators is complex and politically/fiscally sensitive: what do infants need to have a good or 'good enough' quality of life?
- Infants need a balance of economic and emotional care.
- Public and private resources: state/ family; mother/ father.

EVERY CHILD MATTERS

(English outcomes framework, 2003: age insensitive)

- Stay safe
- Be healthy
- Enjoy and Achieve
- Achieve economic well-being
- Make a positive contribution

Quality of life in the first year: some basics



- **24/7 time care**
- **feeding through breast or bottle**
- **emotionally responsive relationships with significant individuals**
- **money**
- **balancing infants access to parental time and economic care.**

- "the most important condition for children's well-being is families' economic stability. Parental leave is seen as guaranteeing that people can have children and return to their jobs without adverse consequences, thus ensuring children's well-being. Children are also seen as benefiting psychologically from mothers and fathers being home with them during their first months of life, without parents feeling economic stress from unemployment. Swedish children have a legal right to have a relationship with both parents, and fathers' ability to take parental leave is one way men can develop their relationship with their children".

Philip Hwang on Sweden (1999)

Balancing parental caring and working

- Infants and older children benefit from both paternal and maternal attention and their emotional and practical support (e.g. Pleck and Masciadrelli 2004;
- Home- based care benefits for infants vs. group settings (e.g. Leach et al 2005) controversial
- Father involvement can act to protect child well-being in dual earner families where mothers work in the first year of children's lives (e.g. Gregg and Washbrook, 2003).
- Paternal income remains an important predictor of children's well-being (e.g. Joshi, 2005)
- BUT optimal balance of paternal/maternal input into quality of care (and location of care), money and time still uncertain (e.g. Yeung, 2004)

Fitting parental leave into quality of infant life jig-saw

Infant mortality

- Ruhm (2000)- 16 Euro nations. Job protected paid parental (mostly maternal) leave associated with lower rates of infant mortality.
- 10 week extension reduces post-neonatal mortality rates by 4.1%.
- Tanaka (2005) 18 OECD confirms Ruhm's findings with controls for birth weight, public expenditure on families and children
- Unpaid leave or flat rate without job protection had no significant effect on infant mortality
- Paid parental leave effect independent of nation's public expenditure on families and children

Fitting parental leave into quality of infant life jig-saw

Breast-feeding Galtry's reviews
(2003, 2005)

- Mothers most likely to cease breast feeding in month of return to work (US and Euro)
- Recommends 'Swedish' model of parental leave enabling mothers to be more home based for the first 6 months to ensure 6 months breast feeding.
- % UK, US, Swedish mothers breastfeeding at 6 months
21/29/73

- Galtry (2003: 174) a mother's right to work and breast feed is an equal opportunity issue:

“This argument centres on the need to conceive the intersection of breastfeeding and women's employment as an 'equal opportunity' concern, both for the ability of women workers to practice breast feeding as well as to ensure the equal opportunity of infants to good health”

Fitting parental leave into quality of infant life jig-saw

- ‘High’ take-up fathers (20% + of leave days) associated with more engagement with children, more housework, general reduction in work hours, lower decline in mothers’ re-entry income (Hass and Hwang, 1999)
- Daddy quota ‘home alone’ fathers report more awareness of infant life ‘slow time’ than fathers having ‘home together’ leave (Brandth and Kvande, 2001)

The Challenge

Promoting gender and generational collaboration in parental leave policy development.

- a good infant quality of life
- reducing structural gender inequalities
- personal preferences
- labour market productivity/ family income requirements