



# Changing Fathers – Reluctant Mothers?

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# Parental leave prior to 2000 – main criticism

- Leave too short
- Economic compensation too low (below minimum wages)
- No flexibility
- Not in accordance with ideas about gender equality
- Different rights in the public and private labour markets



# Main components in the law from 2000

- Parental leave extended from 6 to 9 months, to be used within 18 months
- From a low, flat rate, economic compensation to 80% of salary
- Protection of employment
- Accumulation of social rights
- Three months for the mother, three for the father and three that can be shared
- Financed by insurance levy, paid by employers

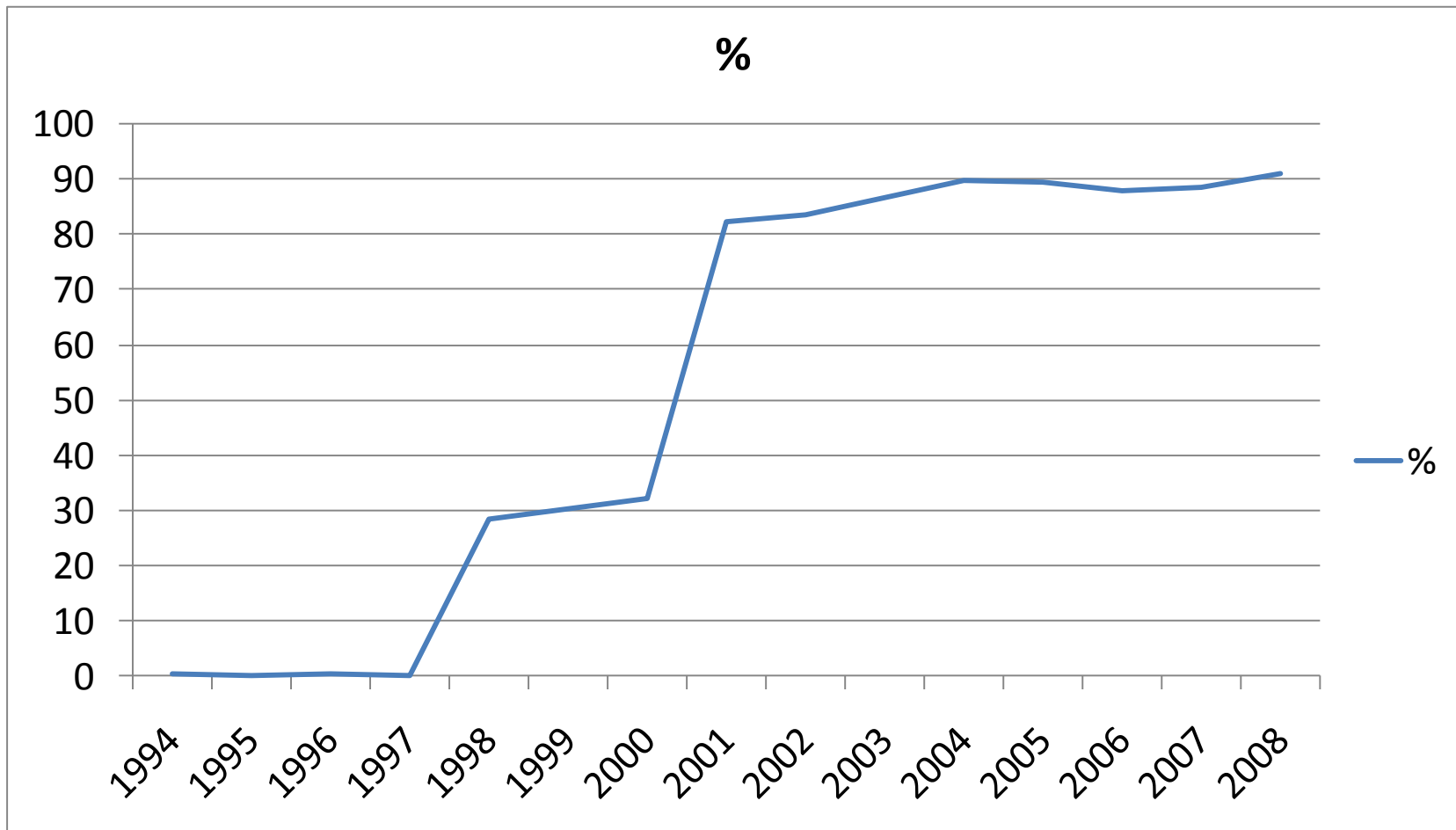


# Goals

- Increase the participation of fathers in childcare
- Improve the position of women on the labour market
- Increase fertility
- Improve the economic situation of families with children

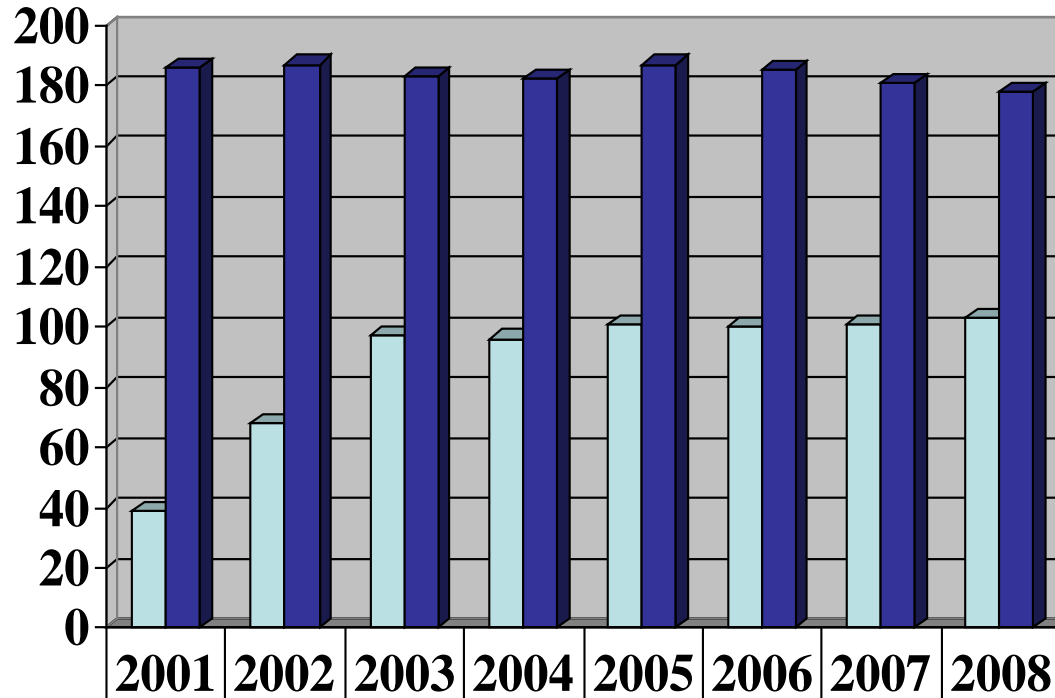


# Icelandic fathers on parental leave





# Average number of days



■ Fathers  
■ Mothers

■ Fathers	39	68	97	96	101	100	101	103
■ Mothers	186	187	183	182	187	185	181	178



# Which fathers are not using their rights?

- **Fathers that do not live with the mothers** (Eydal 2008)
- **Higher educated fathers** (Arnardóttir 2008; Jónsdóttir and Aðalsteinsson 2008)
- **Low earning fathers** (Eydal 2008; Gíslason 2007)
- **Somewhat contradictory results?**



# Changes since 2008

- Ceiling lowered twice, now affects 45.7% of fathers and 19% of mothers
- Preliminary figures indicate that fewer fathers are using the leave and that they are using fewer days.
- Extension of the period parents have to use the leave from 18 to 36 months





# Changes in gender relations

- Observed changes are not necessarily directly due to the parental leave, but have probably accelerated changes already underway
- 1. The division of labour among parents who got their first child in 2003 is markedly more equal than among those who had their first child in 1997, for at least three years after the birth
  - (Eydal 2008)



# Changes in gender relations (cont.)

- 2. The longer the paternal leave has been the more the period has increased fathers: understanding of the needs of an infant; their joy in taking care of the baby; the emotional ties to the baby; their understanding of how much work it is to take care of a child and their participation in the care of the child after the parental leave is over (Arnardóttir 2008)



# Changes in gender relations (cont.)

- 3. Comparison of time use in 2005 and 2010 shows a major change. Men have extended their participation in housework from 30% of the total time to 40.4%. If we use also the figures for paid labour in the surveys then the combined working hours of men (paid work and household work) were almost 6 hours more than that of women in 2005, up to over 7 hours in 2010
- (Þórsdóttir and Stefánsson 2010)



# Changes in gender relations (cont)

- After the new laws 3 books have been written by men, directly relating to their experience of pregnancy, birth and child care. None had been published before
- Play school teachers inform me that when new children are being acculturated there are more fathers than mothers that shoulder that task



# Reluctant mothers?

- In many instances mothers extend their leave for several months
- Mothers, more often than fathers, adjust their labour market participation to bridge the “care-gap”
- Women would like to have longer leave for themselves but not necessarily for the men



# Reluctant mothers?

- Women (66%), more than men (57%) think that families should be allowed to choose “freely” how they divide the leave  
(Jónsdóttir 2007)
- 59.8% think that mothers should have at least 12 months parental leave (more women (62%) than men (56.6%) and fathers 3 (33.9%) or 6 months (32.9%)  
(Jónsdóttir 2007)



# Reluctant mothers?

- There are indications that mothers that do not make full use of at least 6 months are frowned upon or stigmatized
- Similar results from Denmark and Finland



# Future

- The cuts in compensation coupled with other cuts (daycare) could lead to a polarization
- BUT – the government has said that the cuts are temporary
- AND – not a single politician has suggested a change in the structure of the system (“free” choice) though it would mean savings





# References

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