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Fathers in Japan - Parental leave in a father-unfriendly work culture

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Basics and Recent Changes in Statutory Parental Leave Scheme in Japan

Statutory Leave Scheme introduced in
1992

- Either father or mother
- Until 1st birthday of the baby
- No leave benefit

- Conditions (collective agreement)

The mothers need to be working and not on leave for fathers to take leave except 8 weeks after birth (maternity leave period).

- Only for a continuous period.

Changes

2001 Benefit payment: 40% of monthly payment before leave

2005

Conditional extension until child is 18 months
e.g. admission to a childcare centre has been requested but denied for the time being.

2007 Benefit: 50%

Changes

2010.4

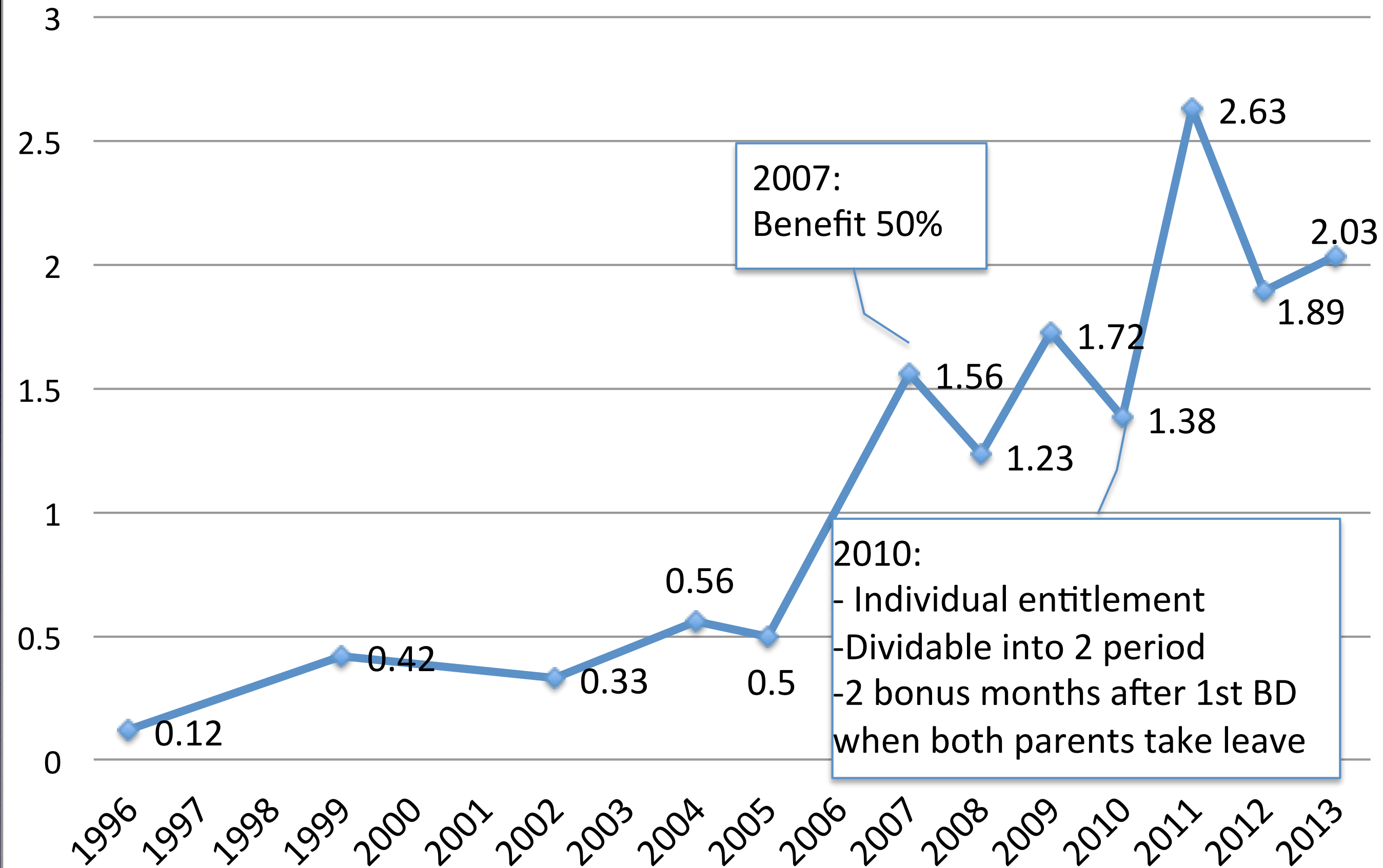
- Individual Entitlement (no conditions about his partners situation)
- Fathers can take parental leave in the first 8 weeks and later again.
- Bonus 2 months (extension until 14 months of age) if both parents take leave (max 1 year/parent)

Latest change

2014.4

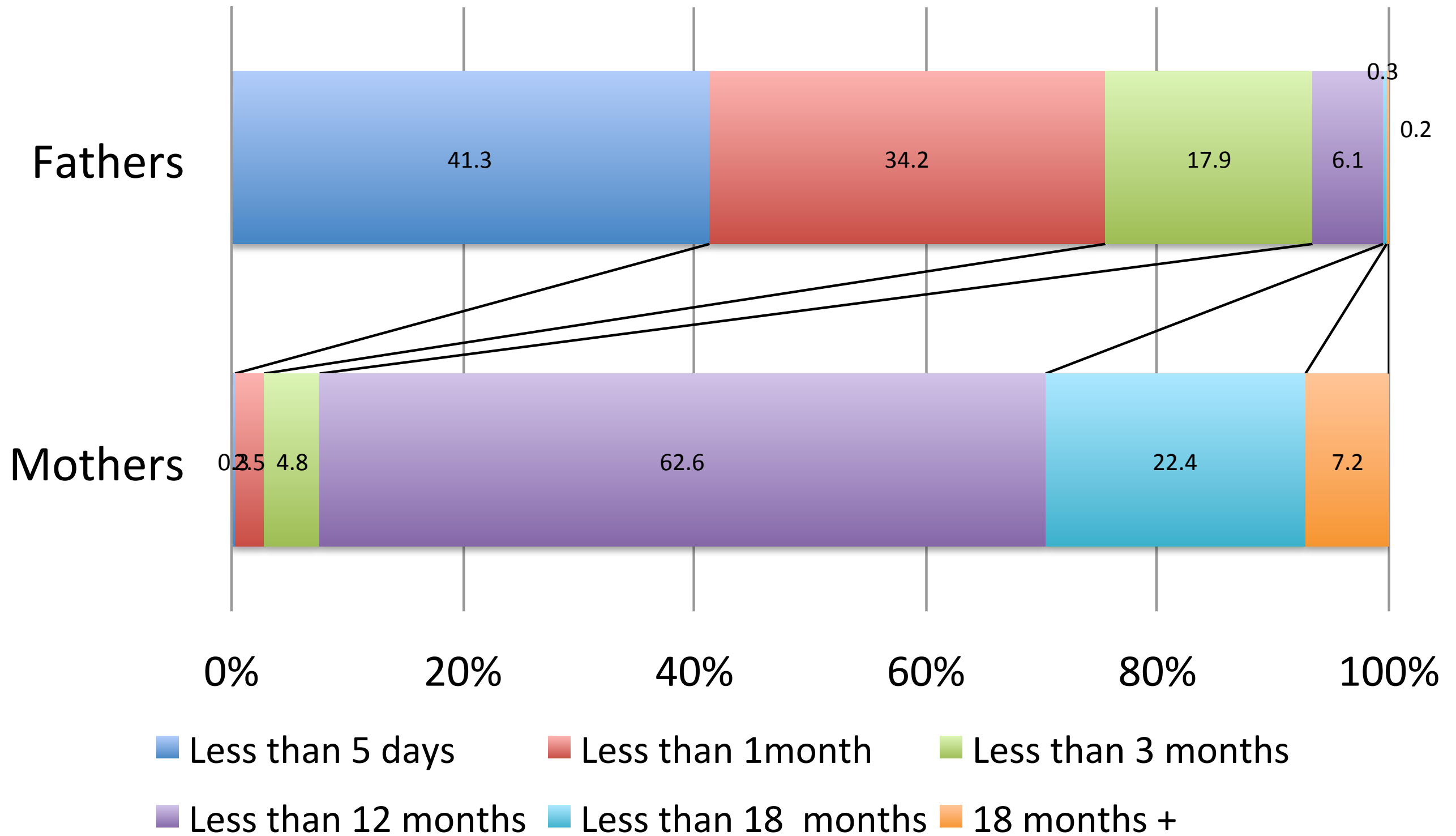
Benefit: 67% first 6 months and 50%
later

Trends in the proportion of fathers taking parental leave



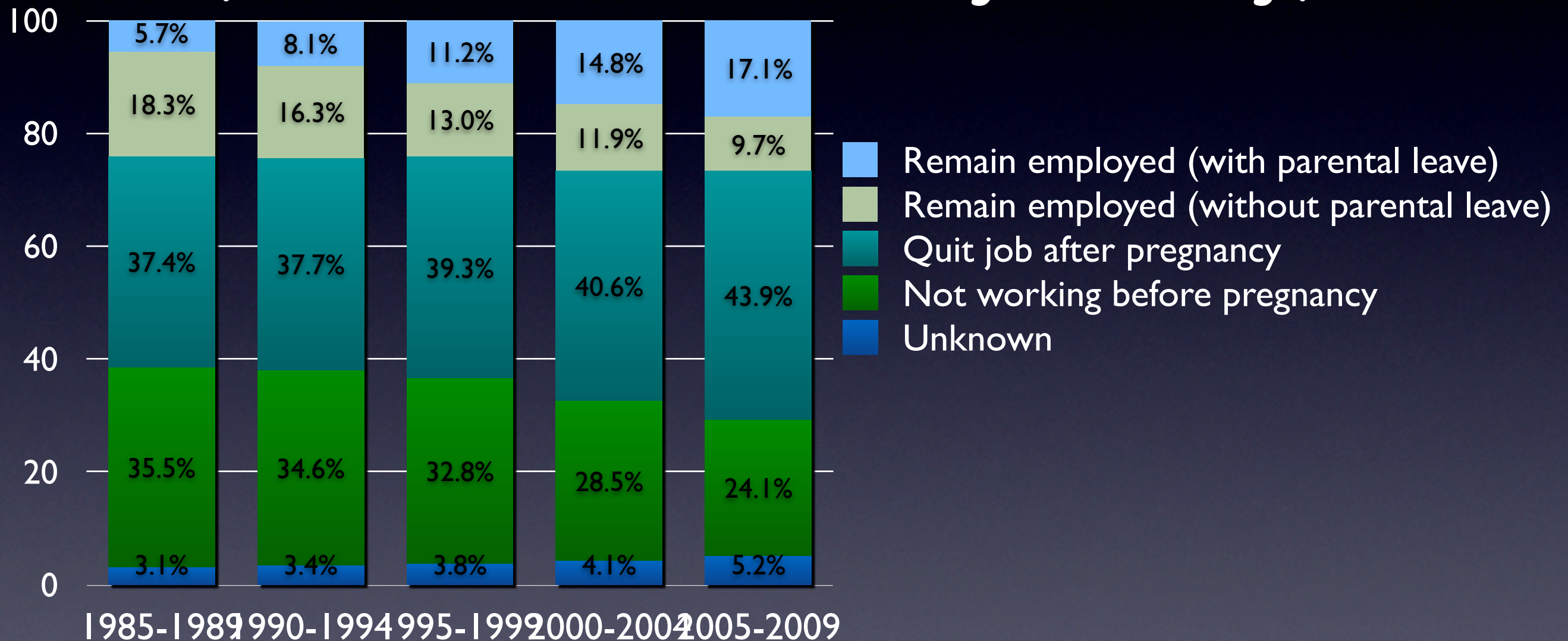
Increase with fluctuations, but still very low.

Leave period taken by Fathers and Mothers (2012)



Fewer fathers took parental leave for 1 month or more (1/4 of 1.89 %)

Mothers' work status by year of the birth of the first child (The National Fertility Survey)



Still many women quit job when pregnant or after the birth of a child,
but steady increase of mother remain employed with parental leave.

Data collection and methods

Sampling Criteria

Fathers who took parental leave alone for more than 1 month with children under 3 years old.

Sampling methods

- Personal connection
- Snowball sampling
- Purposive

Interview details

Participants: 6 fathers

Interview methods: Semi-structured (the guideline for “Fathers on Leave Alone Project”)

Interview length: 2-3 hours (taking note and recorded)

Place: Researcher's office (single-occupied room) or a cafe

Research Questions

(1) What characterizes fathers taking parental leave in the country where it is very rare?

How these fathers were able to:

- deal with income reduction?
- escape from perception that care of the children (or at least parental leave) is for mothers?
- escape from the fear of negative impact on his workplaces?
- escape from the fear of negative reaction from his workplaces?






Research Questions

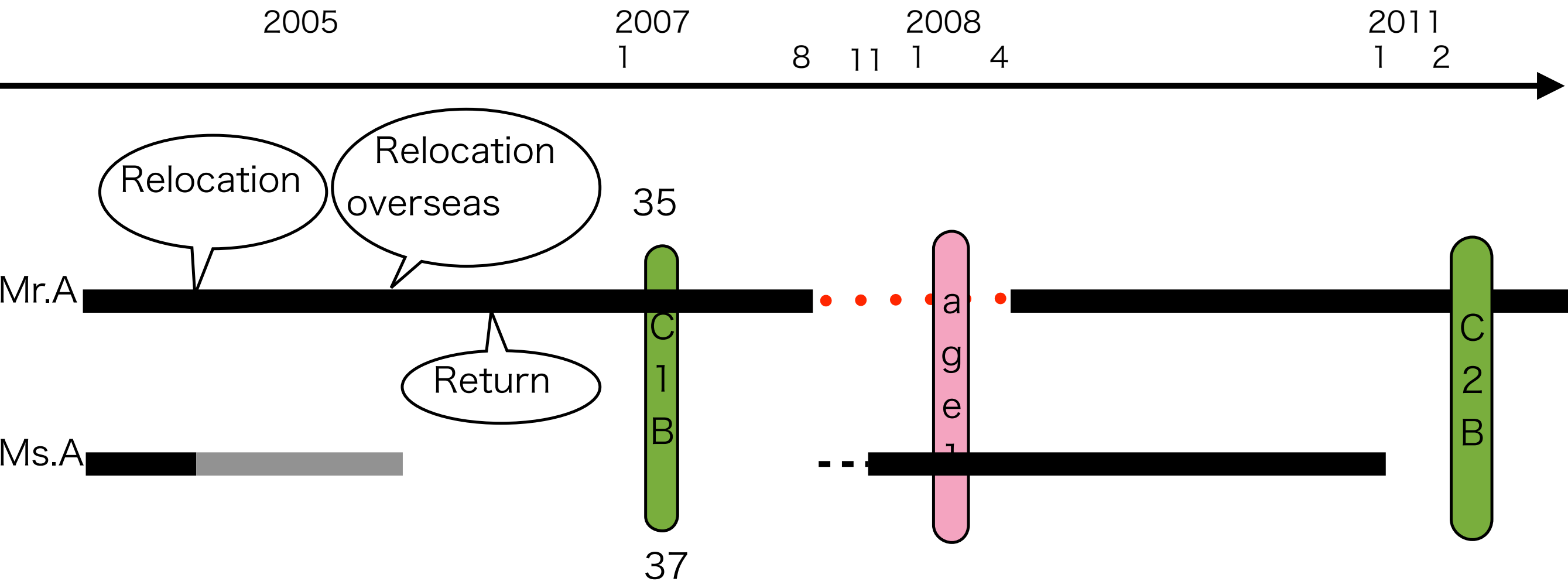
(2) Does father's leave taking promote equal career opportunity between couples?

Research Questions

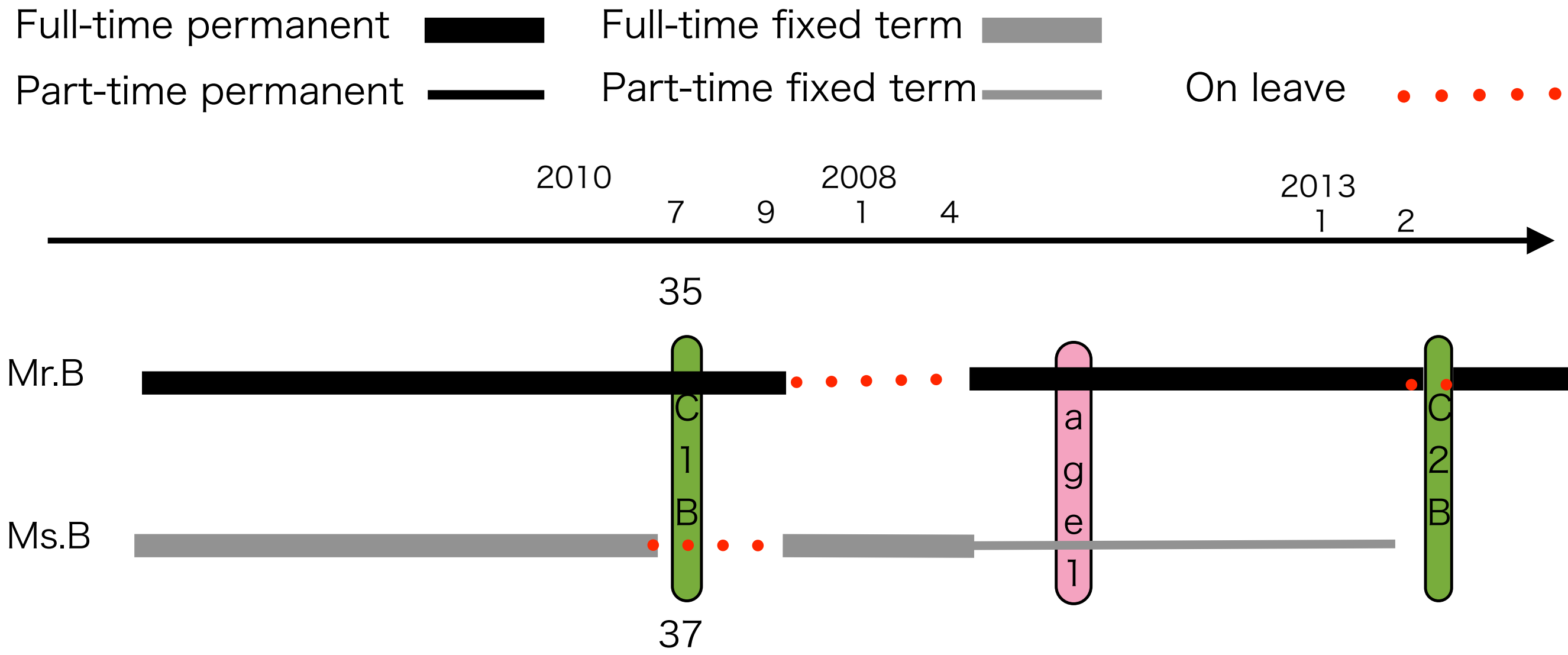
(3) What is their reflection about leave taking?

Leave take-up patterns and profiles

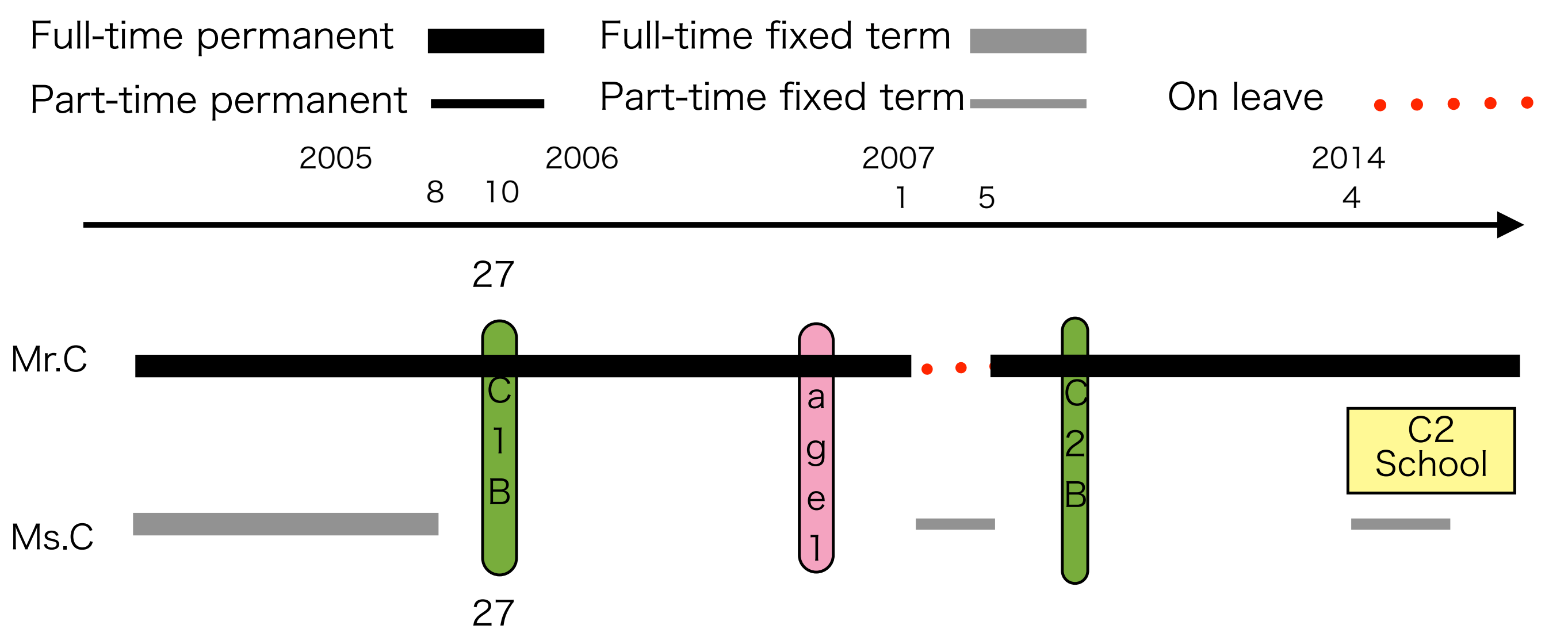
Full-time permanent  Full-time fixed term 
 Part-time permanent  Part-time fixed term  On leave 



Job at the first child's birth: Full-time permanent, a large foreign multinational company
 Benefit payment: 50%
 Decision and negotiation: He offered. It sounded interesting as no other male colleagues haven't taken parental leave.



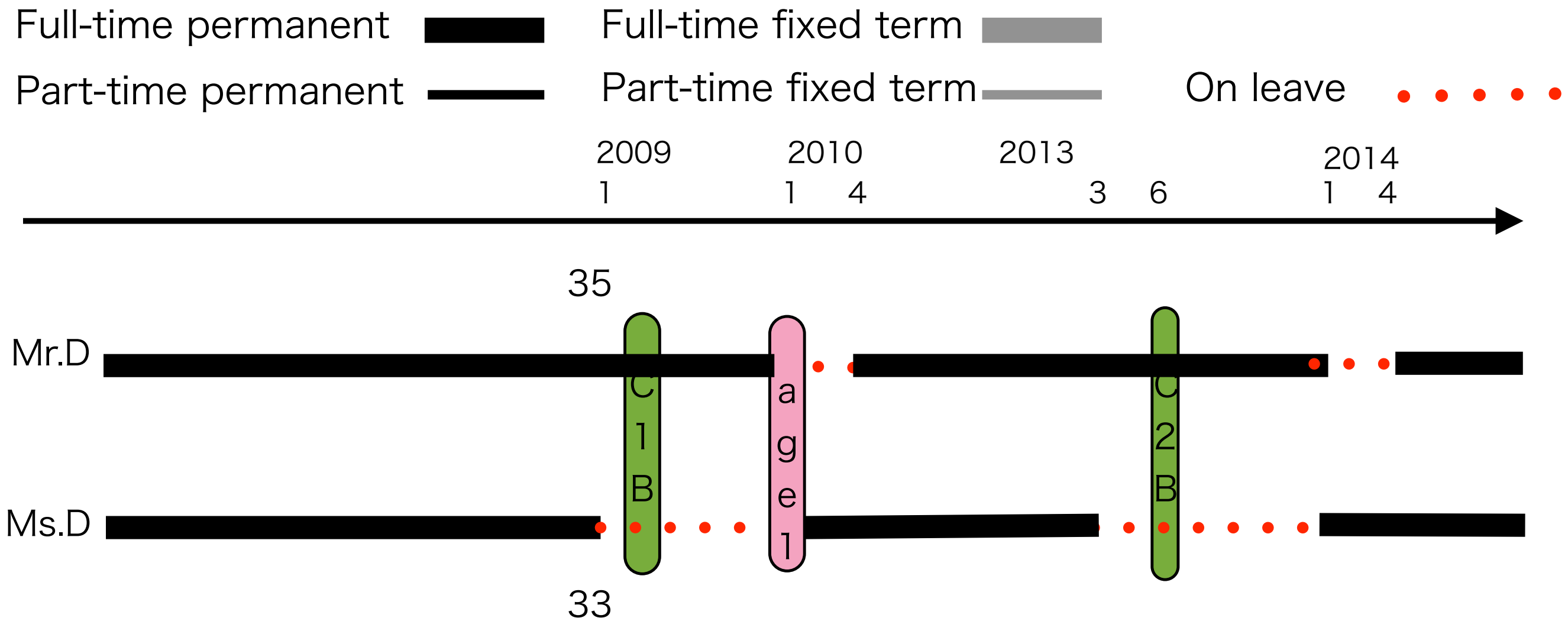
Job at the first child's birth: Full-time permanent administrative staff at a university
 Benefit payment: 80% (50% by employer + 30% Employment insurance)
 Decision and negotiation: His wife has no right to parental leave (only maternity leave). He started research.



Job at the first child's birth: Full-time permanent local government employee

Benefit payment: 0%

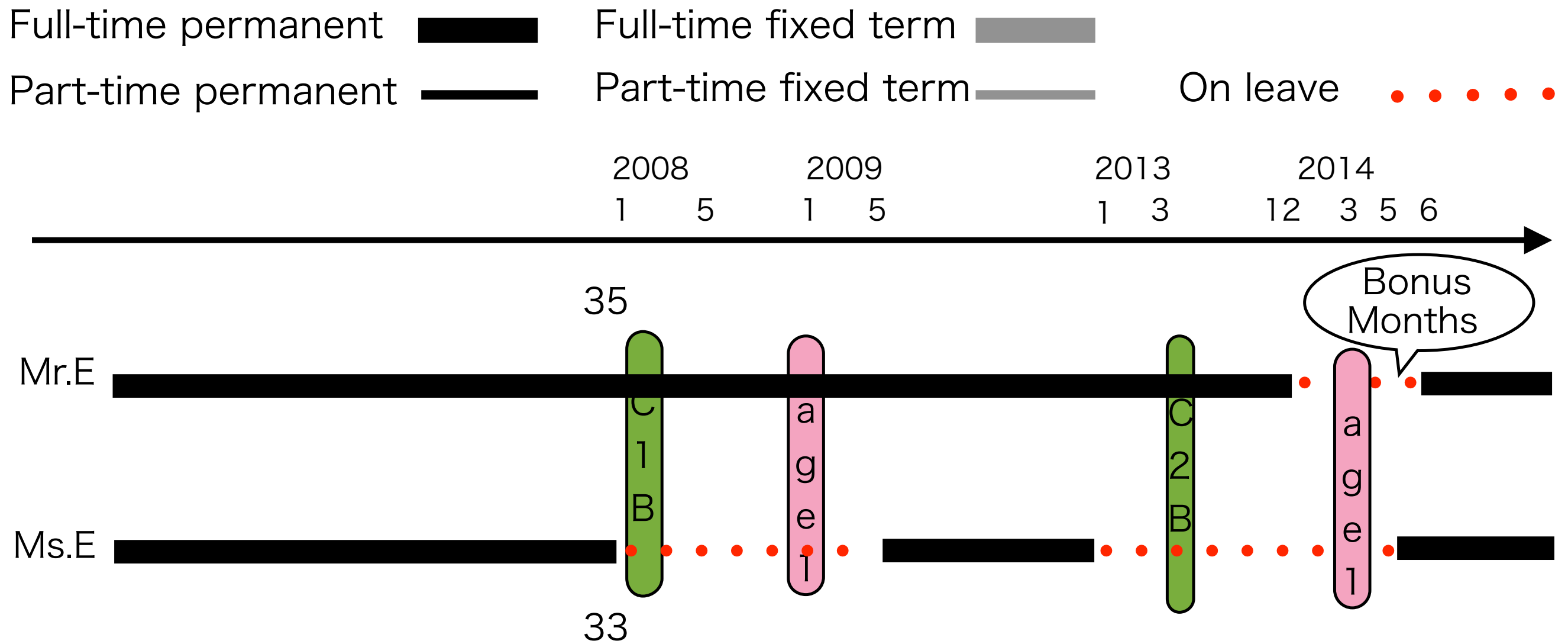
Decision and negotiation: He offered taking leave and ask his wife to find a job because he knew fathers can and thought "why other fathers wouldn't take"



Job at the first child's birth: Full-time permanent engineer at a large foreign multinational company

Benefit payment: 50% same for 2 children

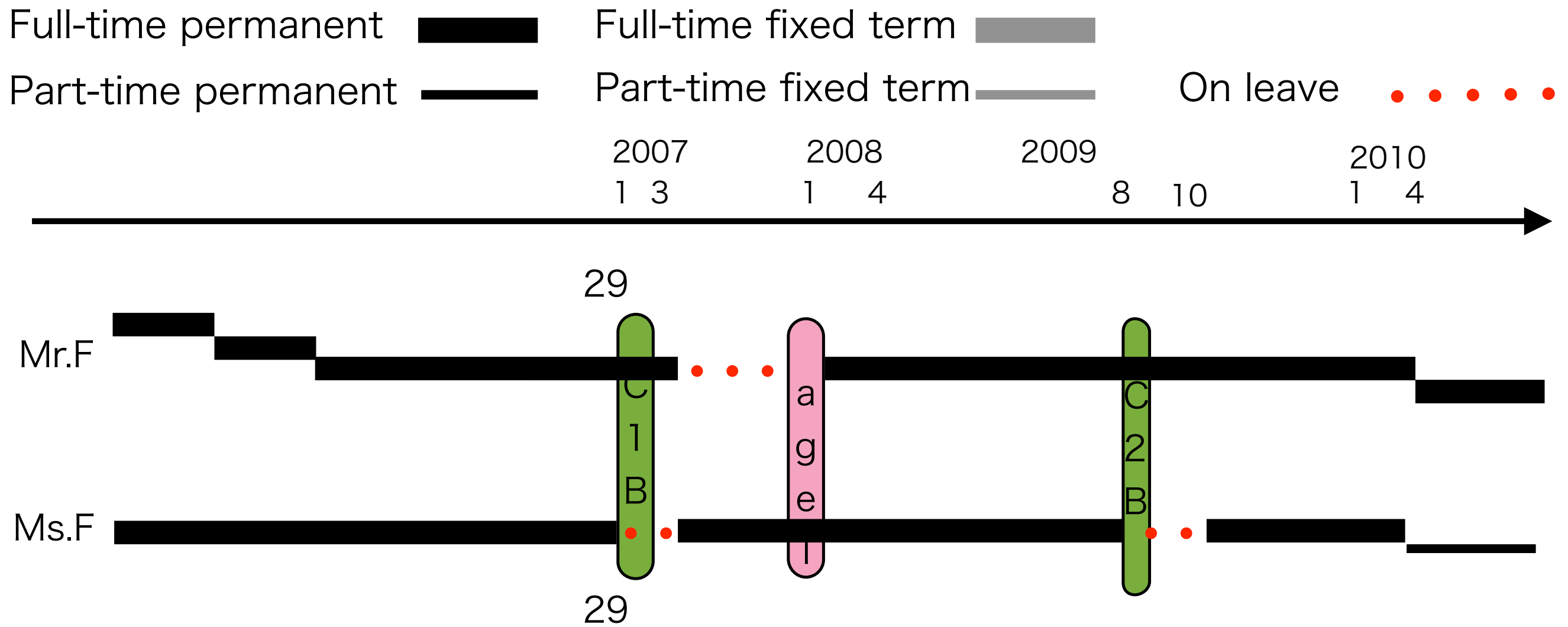
Decision and negotiation: His wife wanted to return to work after 1 year of leave, but couldn't find childcare place for another 3 months. Similar for 2nd child.



Job at the birth of children (took leave for the second child): Full-time permanent employee at a small IT company. Ms.E are working in a full-time permanent position at a large software company.

Benefit payment: 50% (65% including exemption from insurance fees)

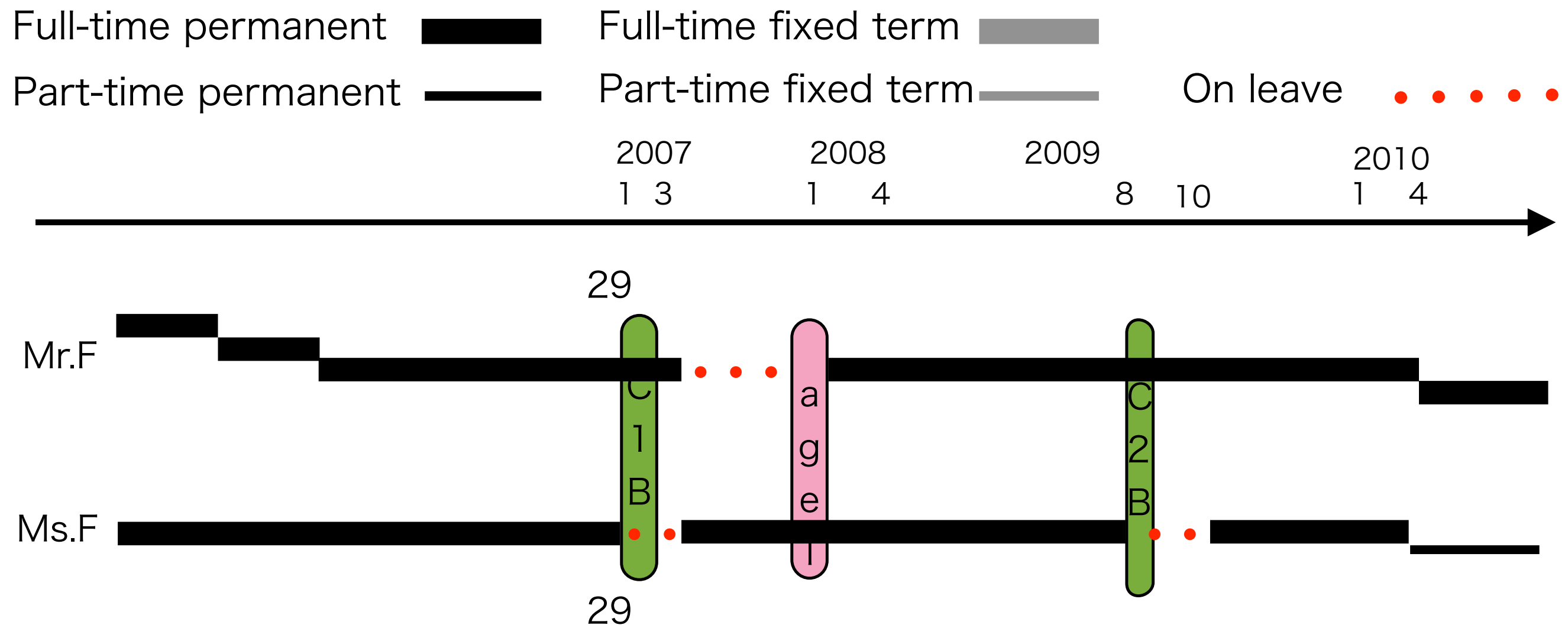
Decision and negotiation: He had been considering if he can continue his work, and his wife suggested his taking leave for their second child. He agreed and asked his wife to continue her leave.



Job at the first child's birth: Full-time permanent pharmacist at a small pharmacy

Benefit payment: 40% (Employment insurance only)

Decision and negotiation: His wife is a surgeon at a university hospital, and her manager wanted her to return to work after her maternity leave, and she didn't want a long leave for her qualification, but couldn't find childcare place for infants. So he checked his entitlement on the Ministry's website and decided to take leave.



Wife's reaction: Worried about his stress.

Manager's reaction: Surprised. Suggested that Mr.F would not find the place to return depending on the contract of the replacement.

What did we find from
the interviews?

How were fathers able to deal with income reduction?

- Long dual career with enough income and saving. (3 cases)
- Calculated the necessary saving and saved beforehand (Mr.C)
- Mother's salary does not necessarily equal father's.
- One case where the mother was earning more than the father (Mr.F)

How were fathers able to escape from perception that child care (or at least parental leave) is for mothers?

- All fathers had been doing housework regularly.
- Wives wouldn't stick to her territory at home.

How were fathers able to escape from the fear of negative impact on his workplaces?

- Supportive managers but no replacement in most cases.
- Relatively short period helped.
- Not necessarily successful.
- Mr. F accepted his manager's suggestion about recruiting employing replacement with permanent position, which means the possibility for him to lose his position to return.

How were fathers able to escape from the fear of negative reaction from his workplaces?

- Supportive managers (Mr.A, Mr.B, Mr.C, Mr.E)
- Strategic preparation before asking manager for leave opportunity (All)
- Qualification that enables a father to find another job even if he lose job and enough income of his wife (Mr. F)

Does father's leave take-up promote equal career opportunity between couples?

- Leave take-up by fathers is not necessarily linked to a continuous career of mothers.
- In three cases (mothers in a fixed term contract) fathers didn't take leave for the second child.
- In the case where the mother is working in a permanent position, father's leave take-up helped her career.

Does father's leave take-up promote equal career opportunity between couples?

However, all fathers:

Increased commitment on child rearing

Changed the way he works



Mothers will have more options when considering new career.

On the other hand, a mother's permanent position allows her partner more life-course choices.

What is their reflection about leave taking?

-Isolation

-Being looked at curiously or suspiciously

-Hard to get into mothers group at playgrounds

Obtained “multi-task” skills

Understood how hard it is to take care of child alone and changed their way

What is their reflection about leave taking?

Hard to recover the up-to-date professional information he had missed during the leave for 10 month.

Hard to talk with clients smoothly.

Able to understand the situation of the clients (mothers) who are taking care of sick children.

One exceptional case with no description of isolation.

Mr.F didn't experience this because of his very exceptional resources.

-A male friend who had already started taking care of a child while he worked at home as a programmer and his wife was working as a full-time surgeon.

-Parents who sometimes visit to see their only grandchild.

One exceptional case with no description
of isolation (cont.)

-Childcare use (2 days/week, 3-4
hours) from the middle of the leave
period

-Cats he had kept before the birth
of the child (continuing
communication, being used to the
“animal” which is difficult to control)

Final thoughts

Difficulties in finding fathers who meet the criteria give some insights in the situation in Japan.

Taking alone is very rare even among the fathers who took parental leave

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Fathers' leave taking seems to be a special event for fathers who are interested in fathers' involvement in the care of a child.

Setting policy target about "proportion of fathers who took parental leave" is likely to conceal the unequal share of work and care.

Fathers on leave alone, in Japan, are still pioneers

-very special resources

(frontier spirit and orientation to fathers involvement in child care)

-opportunities (partner's full-time employment with decent income)

However,

their experiences have a potential to trigger the change in the concept of gender division of labour at work and at home.

We need more explicit support for fathers on leave alone to promote larger take-up.

Sociological methodological implication

Importance of life course approach

->A snapshot at one point of time
cannot describe the transitions of
balance in career priorities
between partners over time