

Parental leave and gender equality in Portugal: assessing the impact of fathers' leave in a new policy environment



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Main aims

- ↙ To understand how new policy environment strengthening fathers' leave rights (2009) impacting on attitudes and practices today, 7 years on (society as a whole, employers, policy-makers, fathers' take-up)
- ↙ To share the methodology set up to tap the impact on attitudes and practices:
 - ↙ data on **fathers' take-up** (Social Security statistics)
 - ↙ special **module on "Attitudes to leave policy and practices"** in ISSP Family and Gender Roles Survey 2014 (representative sample pt population N = 1001, pop over age 18).
 - ↙ **interviews/focus groups** with employers, policy-makers, fathers

2009: Changes in legislation which strengthen fathers' leave rights in Portugal

1. Paternity leave : 4 weeks (2 weeks obligatory)

2. Parental Leave (5 months well-paid) becomes gender neutral: from “maternity leave” to “initial parental leave”

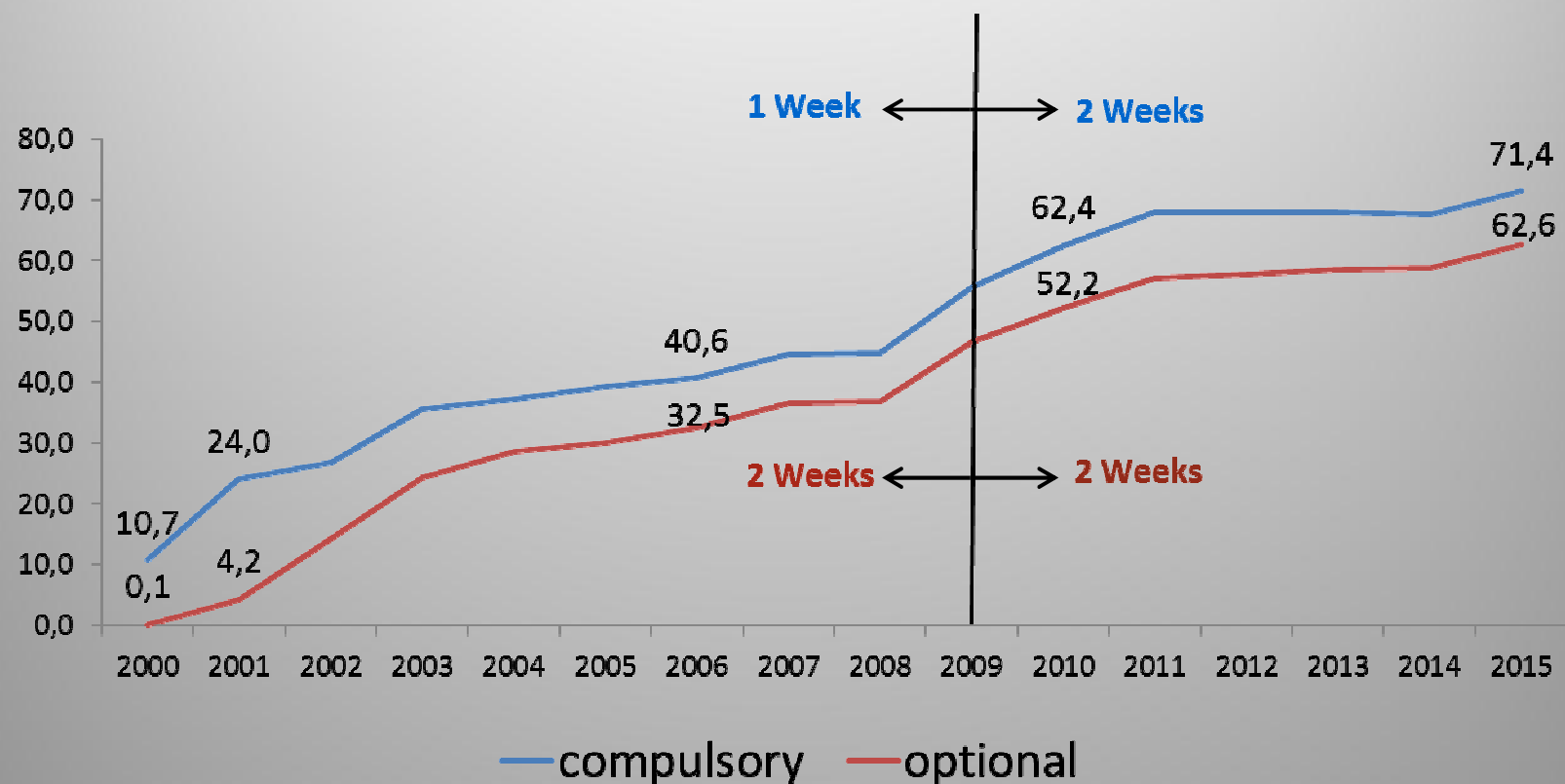
Main features of “Initial parental leave”

- May be taken by either parent (after 6 weeks for mother)
- Provides incentive (BONUS month) for sharing of parental leave:

If the father takes at least 30 consecutive days on his own after the mother has gone back to work “initial parental” leave increases by one month (6 months)

3. Additional parental leave: 3 months, at 25% previous earnings, individual right

Take up of paternity leave (compulsory/optional): nº fathers on leave / nº of births (%)



Take up of shared “initial parental leave” (%)

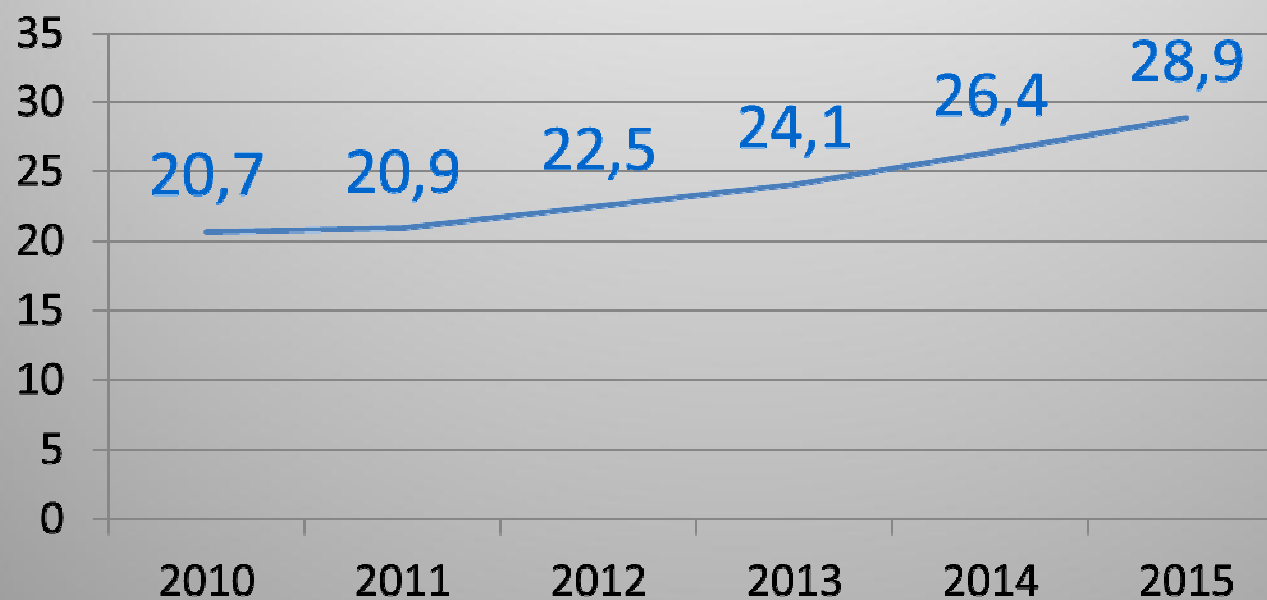


Figure 1 - Attitudes to father's leave:
parental leave and compulsory paternity leave (Portugal 2014)

TO WHAT EXTENT DO YOU AGREE OR DISAGREE WITH:

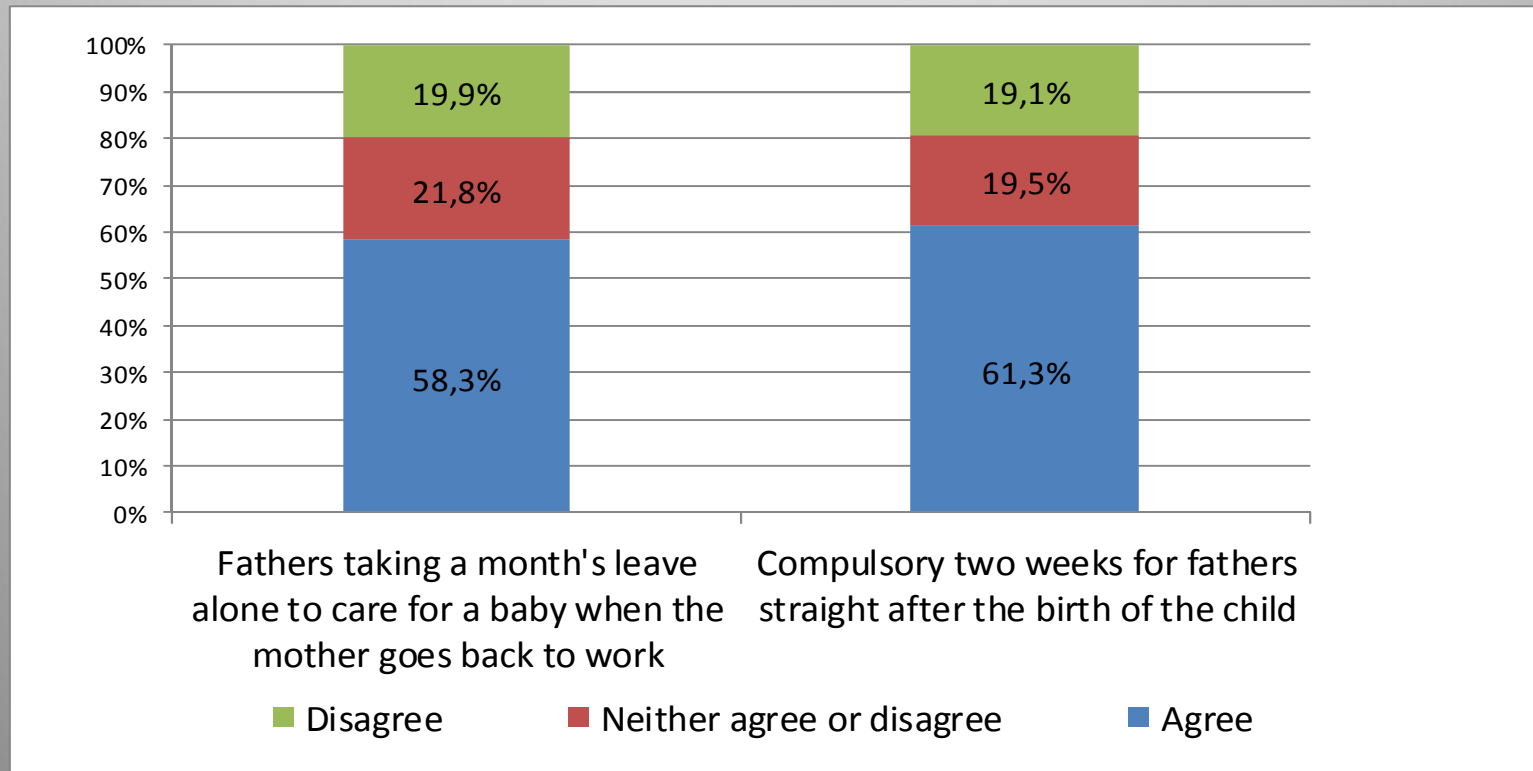


Figure 2 – Proportion of individuals that “AGREE” with father’s leave-taking, by sex and age group (Portugal 2014)

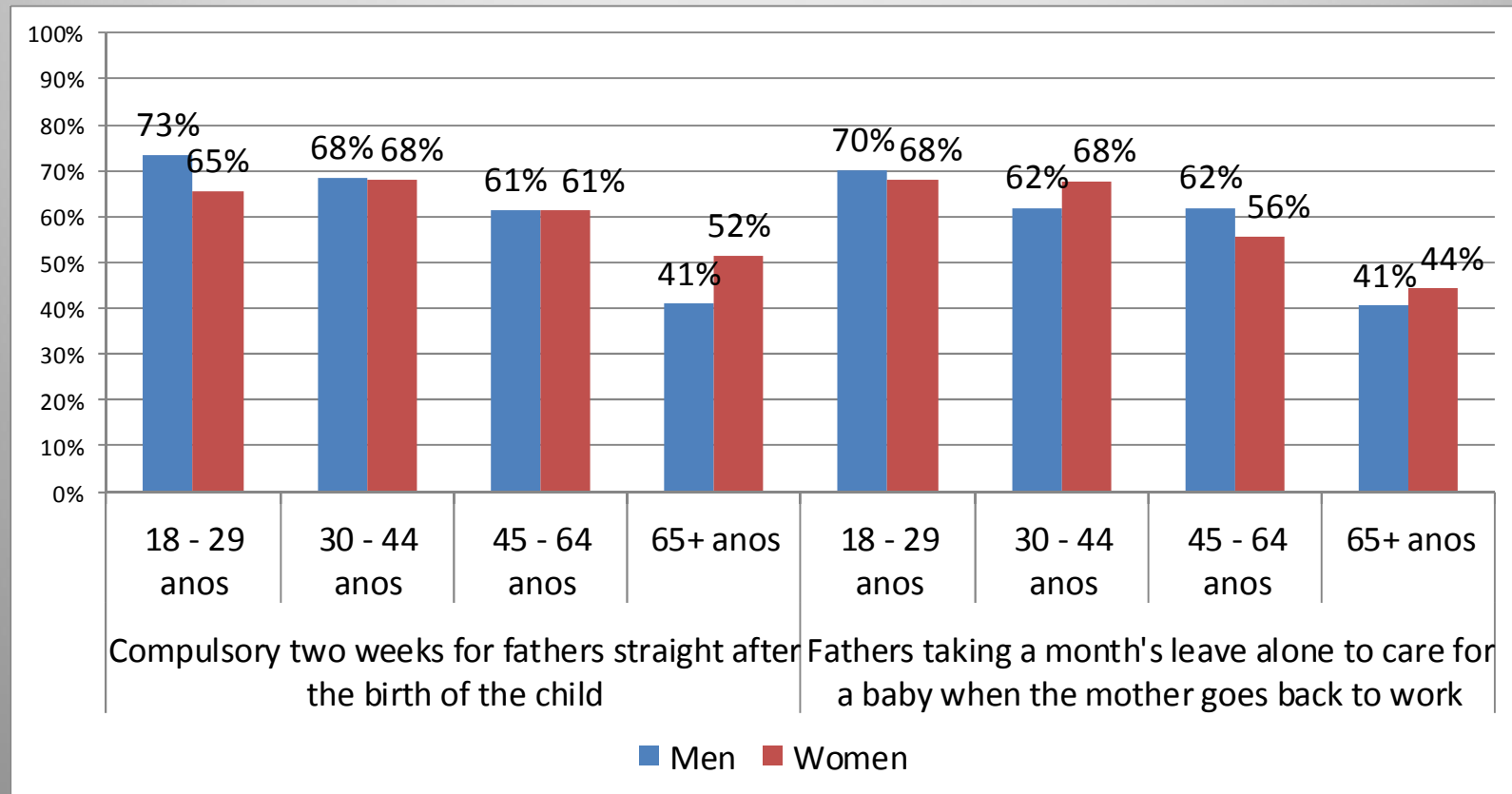


Figure 3 - Attitudes to positive effects of father's take up of leave alone (Portugal 2014)

TO WHAT EXTENT DO YOU AGREE/DISAGREE THAT FATHER'S LEAVE ALONE FOR A MONTH IS POSITIVE FOR THE FOLLOWING:

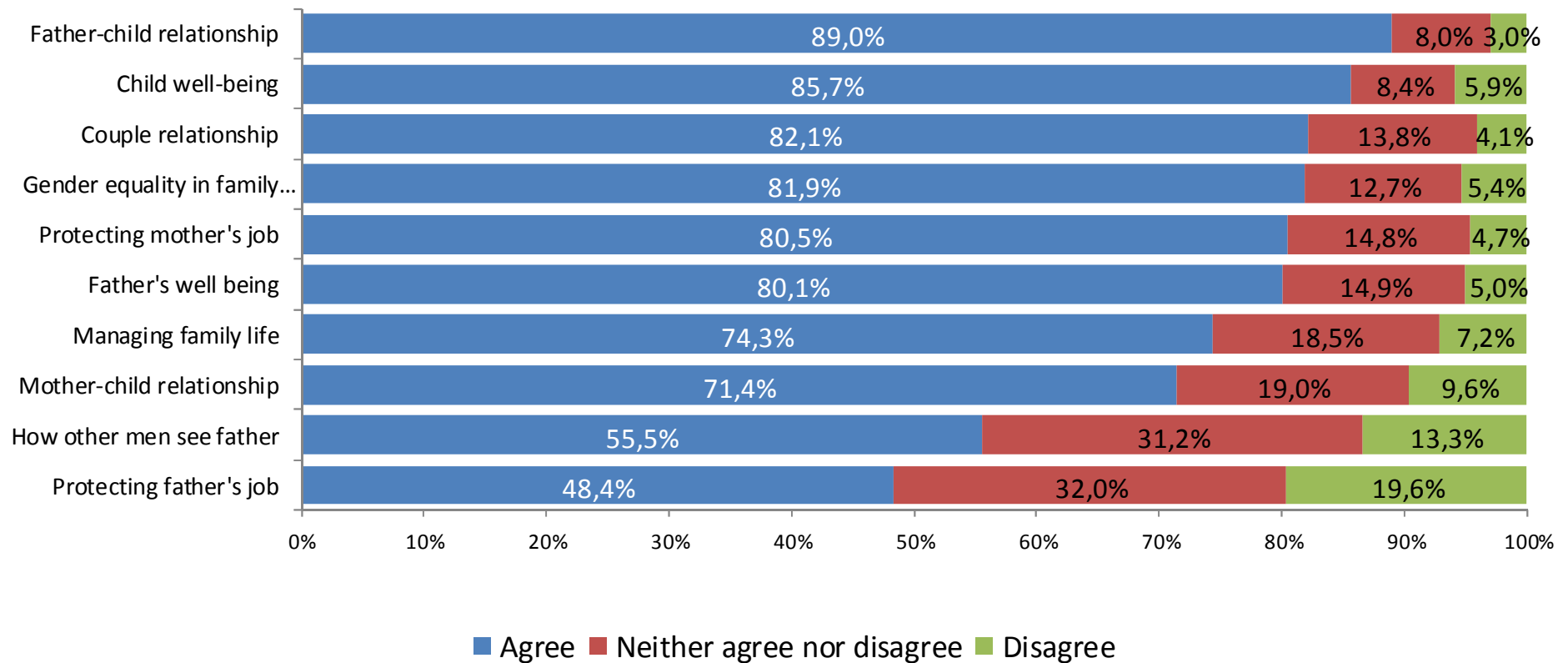


Figure 4 – Proportion of M/W that **DISAGREE** that father's take up of leave has a positive effects on **father's job** by sex and age group (Portugal 2014)

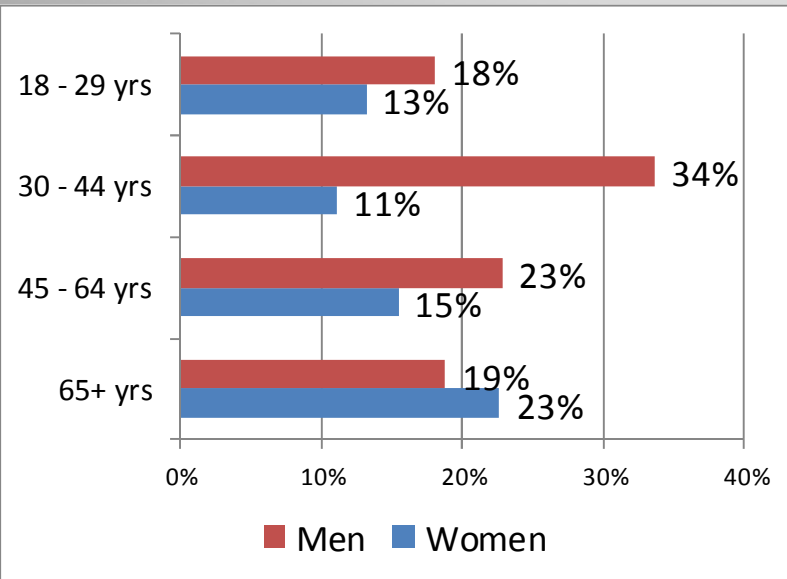


Figure 5 – Proportion of M/W that **AGREE** that father's take up of leave has a positive effects on **mother's job** by sex and age group (Portugal 2014)

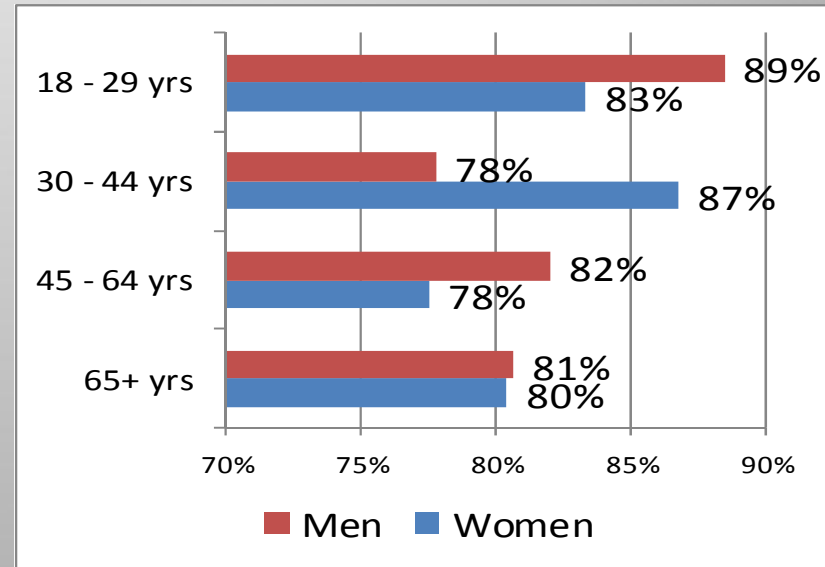


Figure 6 - Attitudes to father's role in early childcare, by sex
(Portugal 2014)

TO WHAT EXTENT DO YOU AGREE OR DISAGREE WITH:

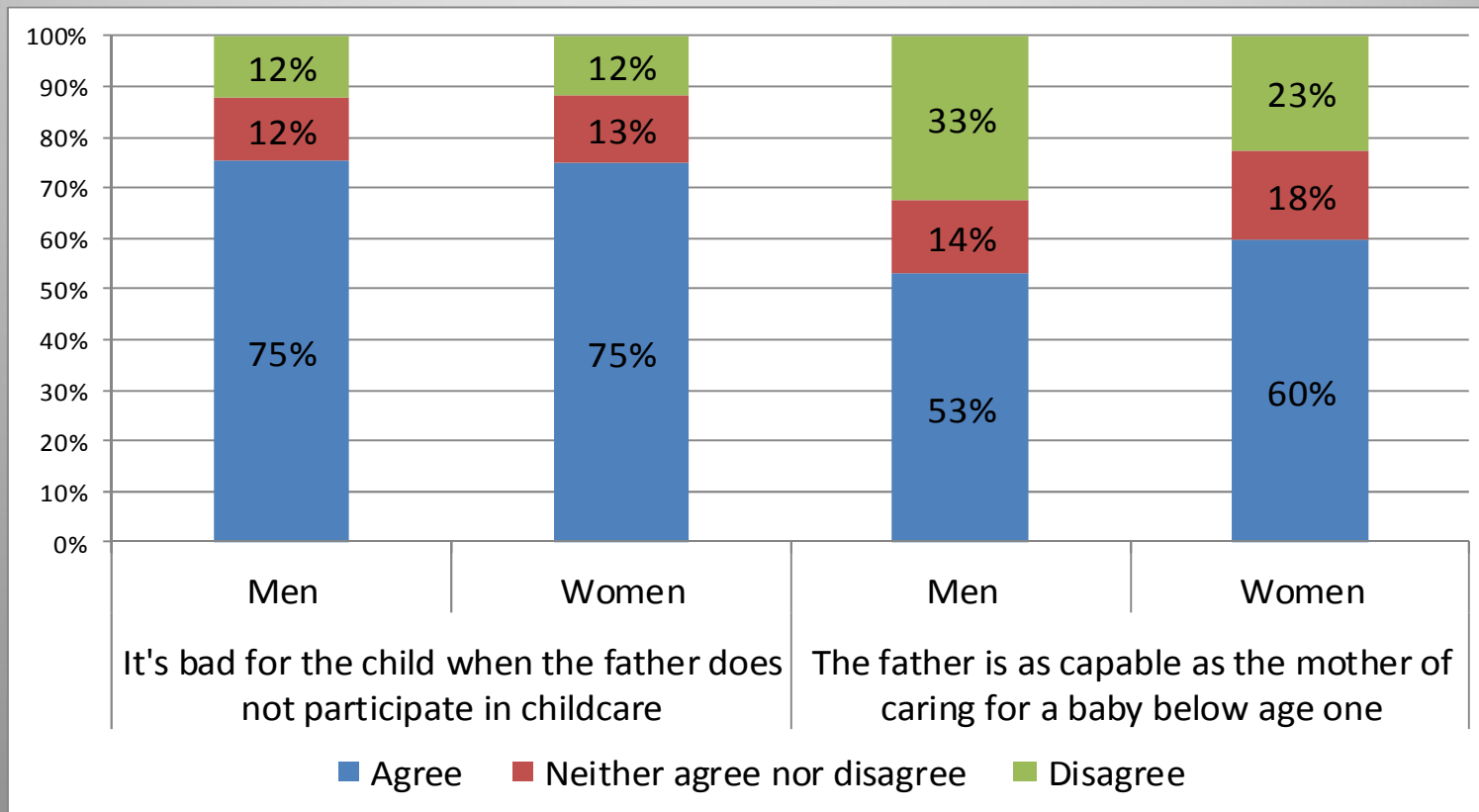
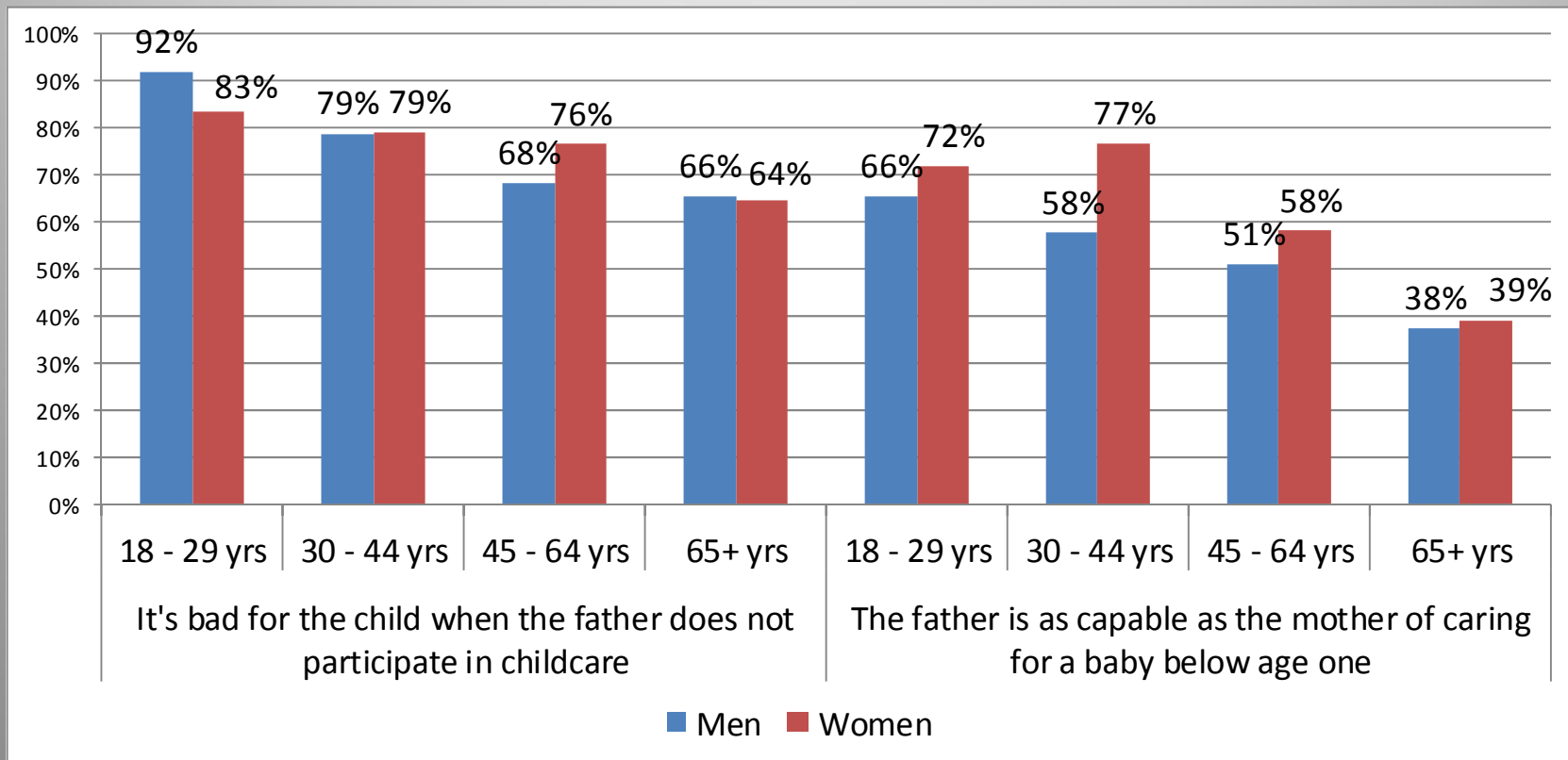


Figure 6 – Proportion of individuals that AGREE “it is bad for the child when the father does not participate in childcare” and that “the father is as capable as the mother”, by sex and age group (Portugal 2014)



Impact of new policy environment on employers' views and practices (interviews 2016)

2 main processes of change (private sector):

↙ Employers' moving from "traditional" attitudes to "sufferance/tolerant":

From leave seen as a mother's job to leave perceived as a "mother's job with some help from the father", especially straight after birth of child

Approval only of compulsory paternity leave (additional leave or sharing only in specific cases i.e. seen as an "option")

↙ Employers' moving from "sufferance" to "acceptance and pro-active" attitudes:

Information and workplace incentives for fathers to take up leave, for both women and men to share reconciliation of work and family life.

Gender-neutral leave identified as a main policy measure to improve women's investment in work and career (getting to top-levels jobs like men) and to boost work environment and decision-making.

BUT still underscoring of availability and flexibility, on the part of both men and women, to come into work if necessary while on leave.

Impact of new policy environment on employers' views and practices

Interviewee, private sector, age 45, Director of Human Resources Management, 2 children aged 14 and 7:

*Here at RN we have promoted a series of **initiatives** at the level of parental leave and work-family balance in general, such as fathers also getting involved in caring for children when they are ill, so that women can also invest in their careers... **One of the main measures is promoting fathers' leave.** What did we do? We interviewed fathers who had been on leave, we interviewed children whose parents had shared leave equally, and we began to disseminate this information on the positive effects of shared parental responsibilities (you know, on our INTRANET and the firm's magazine, we published examples and photos, of fathers looking happy doing things with their babies...)*

*And we do everything we can to incentivate fathers' to take up leave... **So now we have all the fathers sharing leave with the mothers and this happens at all levels of earnings and qualifications, we have carried out this cultural turn... it's our internal policy.** Of course this is not always easy to manage, for example to replace people, especially when they have important work responsibilities. But this applies both to men and women workers, and the problem is not gender but rather the nature of their position. Teams have to be reorganized. But in some situations, when the worker has important responsibilities, I think there has to be **some flexibility on both sides.** In these cases the worker must be available to come in if there is something urgent or to answer emails, there has to be some sort of balance and negotiation.*

Final comments

1. Impact of new policy environment on attitudes and practices:

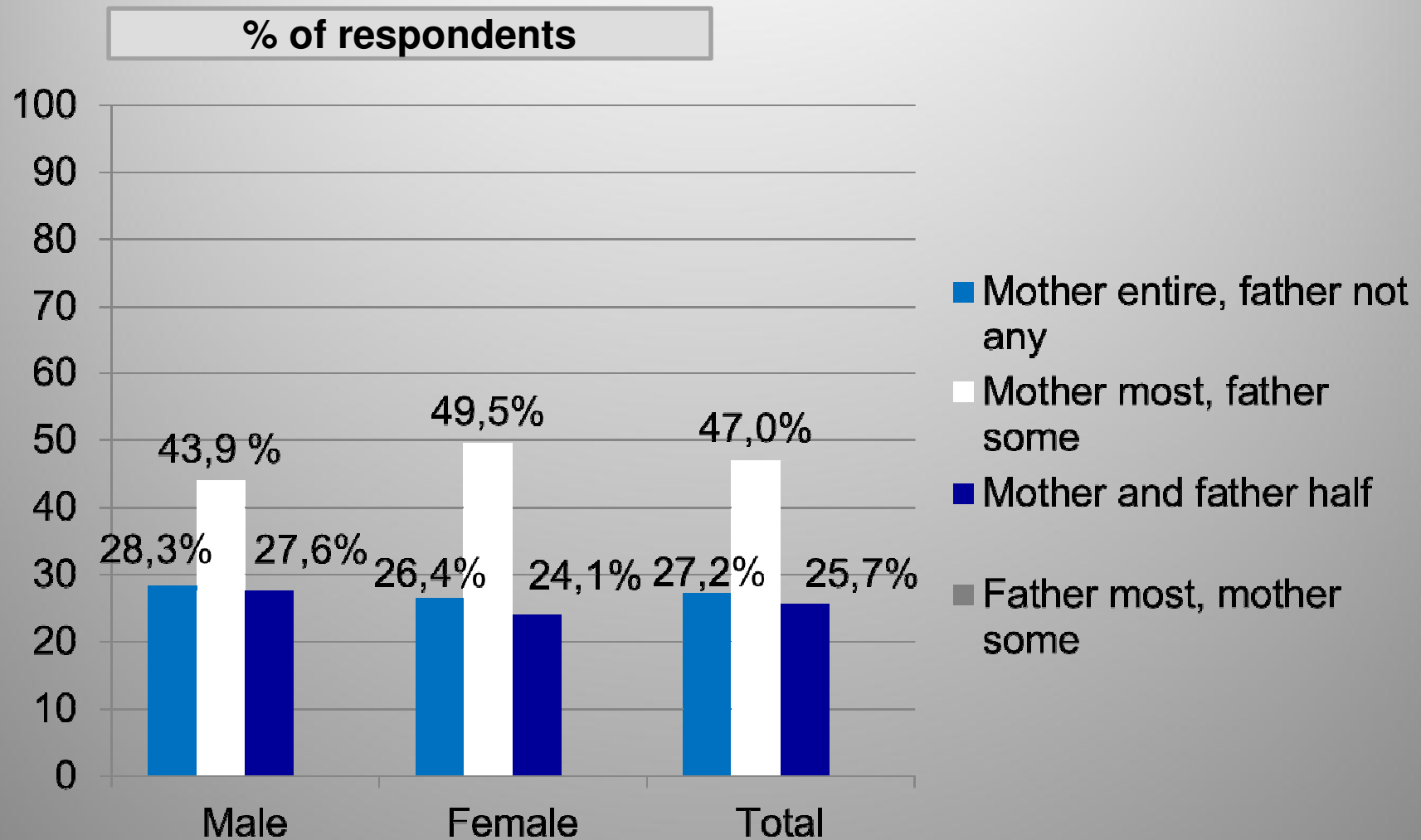
- ↘ **steady increase in take-up**, in particular of compulsory leave. Leave-sharing on the rise, but slower process (almost reaching one in three couples)
- ↘ **changing attitudes, with strong generational differences**: new culture underscoring the importance of father's role in childcare/leave and positive effects of leave alone for parent-child relationship, child and family well-being, mother's job. But negative effects for father's job.
- ↘ **slower change in attitudes towards men's role as primary caregiver, on a par with mother**

2. Assessing Leave Policy Effects - Methodological issues for LEAVE NETWORK:

- ↘ **importance of mixed methods**
- ↘ **improving statistics on leave at national level**
- ↘ **module of questions for national and international surveys (attitudes to policy measures, gender roles, policy effects)**

NEW BOOK?

Consider a couple who both work full-time and now have a new born child. If both are in similar work situation and are eligible for paid leave, how should this paid leave period be divided between the mother and the father?



Key Research Aims

◆ 3 Key aims:

- **To explore lived experiences of fathers:** from the men's point of view how did they approach and what did they do during leave – what experiences, processes of change and other effects are associated with this period of time when father is on leave on his own?
- **To analyse the impact of leave on gendered identities and divisions of care work:** to what extent they challenge conventional models of masculinity and femininity, of masculine and female parental care?
- **To capture the advantages and disadvantages of leave for work-family balance and family bonds:** is the new leave scheme seen as positive, why?

Theoretical and methodological background

◆ 3 major theoretical strands:

comparative social policy, gender studies, sociology families

◆ Dual approach :

- The **interactionist** perspective : emphasizes the autonomous nature of the actor, who constructs and negotiates his or her practices (diversity of experiences)
- The **structural** perspective : emphasizes the influence of normative and institutional contexts (policy setting, workplace constraints, gender regime, professional groups such as pediatricians...).

Past research

- ◆ Factors/contexts/policies which facilitate /hinder father's take-up of leave
- ◆ Impact of taking leave/more leave days on fathers' participation in childcare and in unpaid work
- ◆ Fathers' lived experiences of new leave entitlements. Impact of paternity leave with mother, of "home alone" leave (Daddy month). Stay-at home fathers.

- ◆ **Some Findings of Research on Fathers' experiences:**
 - Fathers become aware of infant life and "slow time" (daily life rhythm related to caring) (Brandth & Kvande 1998, 2001)
 - Fathers experience strengthening of father-child bonds and skill-building (Lamb, 2004; Rehel, 2014). More valuing of unpaid work and child-oriented masculinity (Doucet and Merla, 2007)
 - Fathers build up a Masculine form of Care Work and being at home: committed to "doing things with child and "teaching" independence; being with child rather than doing housework; doing other activities... (Brandth & Kvande 1998, 2001)
 - "Undoing gender" not a major trend (Huttenen, 1996; Chronholm, 2002; Rostgaard, 2002; Lammi-Taskula, 2008; Deven, 2005...)

Sample and Methods

- **Purposive sampling procedure: 14 IN DEPTH INTERVIEWS**
- **MEN** living in cities of Lisbon and Covilhã (2012), who had taken leave for 30 or more days

AGED: between 28 and 40, 1 aged 54

Full-time DUAL-EARNER COUPLES

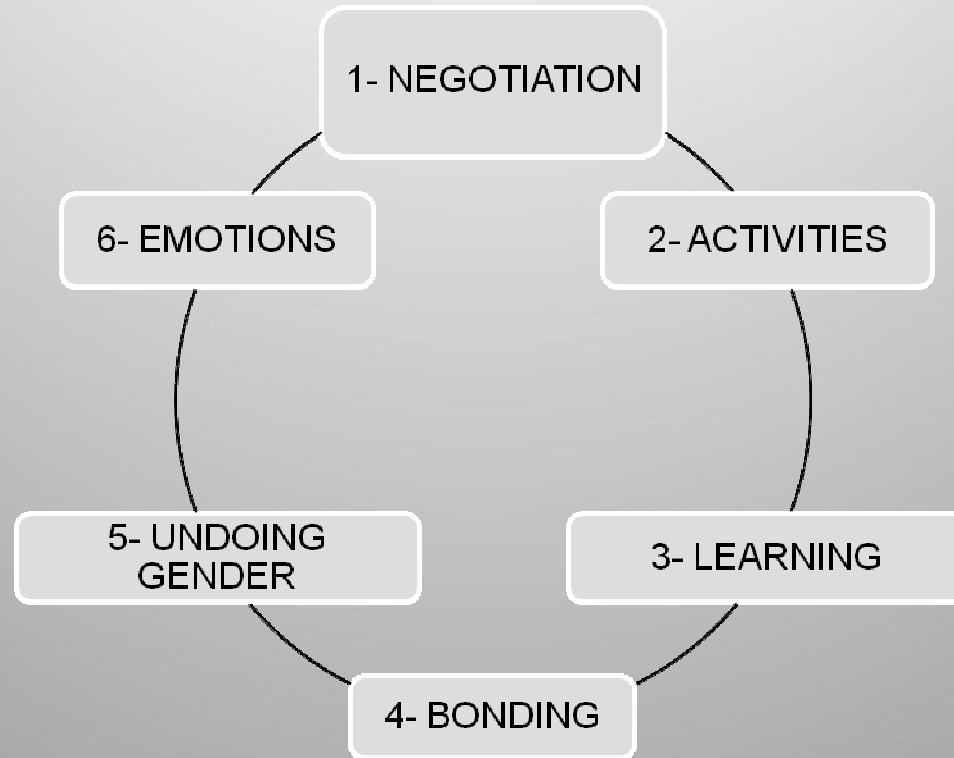
Employment SECTORS : 6 private sector, 5 public sector, 3 state corporate sector

PROFESSIONS : policeman, accountant, hairdresser, television journalist, driver, nurse, aircraft maintenance engineer, sports manager, internet maintenance manager, architect, designer, management consultant, computer engineer, senior civil servant

Interview: 2-3 hours, taped, transcribed

Data coding and analysis

Results 1: Father's experiences of "parental leave" - 6 key processes



6 key processes

1 - **NEGOTIATION:** with employers, partners, the state:

*“ T. and I still thought about whether she would take five and I one, or she would take four and I two, but I couldn’t take two months with my job. Even one was bad enough ... well, it wasn’t bad, I can’t really say it was bad, I can’t compare the work I do with working in a factory, where punishment and reprisals are much more noticeable. But I think there are ways of doing these things. There’s no longer any physical whipping, **but there are still the psychological blows.** That’s more like what I went through, that psychological game. At the time, as soon as I knew, I told them – because you have to give as much notice as possible with these things – that I intended to take a month’s leave and that it would be in July of that year. **The first question they asked me was why I wanted to take a whole month, wasn’t it enough to take just a few days ...”***

(Manuel, aged 34, internet maintenance manager, private company, 1 child)

6 key processes

1 – NEGOTIATION focusing more on the interests of the mother and the child:

“We were updated on the changes in legislation and **we discussed what to do**. We preferred that she took the maximum she could take and then... I came on the scene. Because **she was breastfeeding** and so this was an advantage. And then we thought it was important to put off the **moment when the baby went to the crèche**. Her sisters were so small at 4 months. And there was another aspect to the decision:: my **wife’s job**. It was always difficult for her to stay away from the courts for long, the work piles up (...). We had to find a balance between caring for the baby at home for a bit longer without penalizing our working lives”

(R, computer engineer, wife judge, 3 children, option 4 plus one month)

6 key processes

2 - **ACTIVITIES:** caring (period of intense activity), housework, a little work...

“it was a very demanding month ... I was with him. He’d wake up, I’d give him his bottle, then he would go back to sleep a bit more during the morning, then I would play with him, I was here with him. Then I’d make lunch, tidy up, spend part of the afternoon with him, interacting with him, playing. Then, well, he would sleep a bit more, but almost every time I thought I’d take a bit of a rest after tidying up and having done all that stuff, he would wake up. It was an almost never-ending cycle, with no rest in between, it’s really very tiring looking after a kid all day”

(Rafael, 28 years of age, management consultant, private company, 1 child)

6 key processes

3 - **LEARNING**: becoming an INDEPENDENT CARER, taking on RESPONSIBILITY, learning EMOTIONAL CARE

*“I have a clear idea that I reminded myself to say ‘right, it’s time to feed, or give him the bottle, it’s time to go to sleep...’ (...) I may even have done some things before - [with his other children] - but it was always **with my wife to guide me. This last time I was home alone, so I acted more responsibly**” (...) but I also managed to get over that initial panic, of saying whenever he cried “he’s crying, what’s happening?” and I said to myself, right, ‘this must be the nappy or it must be time to give him the bottle’, so there was... a bit less panic, my reactions were a bit better organized and rational”*

(Roberto, 54 years of age, computer engineer, state corporate sector, 3 children)

*“That’s when we truly become parents, isn’t it? When we have such a close tie to them that **we know just by the kind of crying, or by his manner, what he wants ... it’s that kind of awareness** which I think is very important”*

(Rafael, 28 years of age, management consultant, private company, 1 child)

6 key processes

4 - **BONDING**: stronger ties between FATHER and SON, HUSBAND AND WIFE

“During that time I spent alone with my daughter, she developed a **very strong bond** with me. Actually she got so close to me that when she woke up at night she only wanted me, she only quietened down with me. We are very good friends, we two”

(Leonardo, 32 years of age, hairdresser, 2 children)

“I always used to do a lot, but when I stayed at home by myself, that’s when I understood the important little things that happen in day-to-day life, and I think that helps me to appreciate the other side as well (...) because I had to do those things I think we got to know each other better, and I think **it actually helped our relationship quite a bit**”

(Manuel, 34, internet manager in a private company, 1 child)

6 key processes

5 – UNDOING GENDER: moving away from routine gender practices and female mediation (weak undoing of gender); contesting pre-conceived male and female roles (deconstruction of gender differences)

*“I think equality (...) is not just household chores, it’s not just your worries, not just the shared leave ... **I think it’s the other side, really understanding the man,** (...) That other side is more of an effort, isn’t it? It’s more of an effort. Making meals, being at home all day, that’s an effort, so it’s good to share that aspect...The other thing is – I can even sleep with him here close beside me, feel his warmth, even though I (the man) have to wake up and go and fetch him, then it’s ‘look, go and fetch him’, ‘right, I’ll stick with the worst part which is going to get him, and you get the best part, which is staying with him. **Why don’t we share it the other way round?** You go there, make up the bottle, you go and fetch him and I’ll give it to him in bed’. That doesn’t happen, but I think that’s the next step, **that may be the next step ...**”*

(Manuel, 34, internet manager in a private company, 1 child)

6 key processes

6 - EMOTIONS:

pleasure, liking, happiness, satisfaction, willingness, ability, responsibility,
condfidence (in oneself/the future of the child), connection, proximity, affection,
friendship, challenges, testing oneself, pride, calm, empathy, mutual understanding,
tiredness...

Results 2: Diversity of experiences

4 PROFILES

SUPPORTED

FUNDAMENTAL BREAK

INNOVATION and
INDEPENDENCE

INNOVATION and
DECONSTRUCTION

Profile – SUPPORTED

- ◀ *A **third party is present** and helps with the caring (mother, domestic employee, wife on holiday...)*
- ◀ *The father has a greater sense of responsibility, learns a little, but sees himself as a “**supportive father**”, a “helper” (in contrast to the mother as the main and natural carer).*
- ◀ *The period of leave is appreciated mainly from the child’s point of view and for strengthening family ties. **The fact that the father is left alone is less important.***

Profile – FUNDAMENTAL BREAK

- ◆ *The period of leave is experienced as a key moment of transition, a **fundamental break with highly differentiated gender roles** (in dual earner/female carer couples)*
- ◆ *These are men who were weak “helper” fathers in a context where female management of unpaid work was the rule: considered as inefficient, they were never allowed to be responsible for any task, even though they would have liked to take on more. The period of leave offers a **time of unusual responsibility and independence, allowing for an important process of learning of both material tasks and parenting concerns** .*
- ◆ *The final result is double-pronged: Interviewees continue to see themselves as “helper fathers” and the mother as primary caregiver, but they feel that they have changed, in particular they have become **more confident in the home and in the parental role, having discovered that fathering is a domain which is not necessarily mediated and guided by the mother ...***

Profile – INNOVATION and INDEPENDENCE

- ✦ *In this profile the father on leave becomes a **fully “independent carer”** to whom all tasks can be delegated. The period of leave brings little in the way of new learning (‘I already knew how to do that’, ‘I didn’t need a parachute’), but it is the final step towards full autonomy.*
- ✦ *In addition to strengthening bonds between father and child, this profile highlights the importance of **creating empathy with the mother’s feelings** of tiredness when she is the sole carer.*
- ✦ *Leave alone is seen as crucial for the father to become a **highly involved parent** and competent and **equal promoter** of work-family balance; as positive for the family as a whole (strengthening bonds between father and child, partners, and triangular bonds).*

Profile – INNOVATION and DECONSTRUCTION

- ◆ *In this profile the father becomes an “independent carer,” but he also regards the **period of leave “on his own” as a fertile ground for building gender equality** (he sees himself as ‘an egalitarian father and partner’ who is ‘at the heart of the family,’ as his wife is).*
- ◆ *The man ‘**tests himself out**’, embarking on tasks which he regards as difficult (going out, planning, having people in), and becomes **more reflexive** with regard to gender relations, **questioning those differences between men and women** which are conventionally held to be natural.*
- ◆ *In this profile the period of leave is viewed as a time when parents are able to **deal with “in-built” cultural norms relating to gender roles.***

Conclusions

1. As revealed by previous research, fathers' experience of **leave alone** is highly valued because it **contributes to work-family balance and to the strengthening of father-child bonds and family ties in general.**

Most valued characteristics of new leave scheme for w-f balance:

- An extra month of **well-paid leave** for fathers (fathers do not lose income and new leave policy is enabling them to take up parental leave)
- Being able to care for a **child at home for longer**
- Couples **share the professional costs of absence from work.** Costs for employers are also distributed
- **Bolsters fathers' skills** in parenting and unpaid work, also enhancing fathers' **autonomy** (fathering without mediation) as well as **understanding** of parenting concerns and work-family stress

Conclusions

2. Findings point to a **diversity of lived experiences** rather than one main pattern. To identify this diversity and the social consequences of leave, it is necessary to take into account **different processes of the leave experience**.
3. Findings **do not reveal a dominant form of “masculine care”**. Most fathers see themselves as involved caregivers who replace the mother in all the nurturing and caring tasks rather than distant carers or educators. Findings reveal experience of **“fast time”** rather than “slow time”.
4. From the perspective of the impact of leave on gender equality, this diversity means that the experiences of fathers are **not always similar or equally transgressive from a gender perspective**.

Conclusions

5. What factors are associated with the “innovation-deconstruction of gender roles” profile?

- ✦ **A project and desire for individualized parenthood, i.e. taking everything on, on one's own, and doing it in one's own way** (tied in with the perception of the man as an independent actor in the home, one who may adopt the role of the mother)
- ✦ **Pro-active behaviour (agency) on the part of the man:** an extra effort, in other words “testing himself out” (being sure that he knows how to do everything and more)
- ✦ **Egalitarian (dual earner/dual carer) couples, in norms and practices,** who try to neutralize gender in family roles and places (all things may be done by him or her)
- ✦ **Family-work reconciliation values** focused on **the importance of the family and not just work**
- ✦ (Men with similar or lower professional status and income levels as partner + medium to high educational levels)

THANK YOU.

PUBLICATION:

WALL, K. (2014), “Fathers on leave alone: Does it make a difference to their lives?”,
Fathering – A Journal of Research, Theory and Practice about Men as Fathers
(accepted 6 May)

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Normative and Institutional Contexts

- ✦ **GOVERNMENT/LEGISLATION:** new leave rules which “prioritize the incentive to **child-bearing, gender equality** through the strengthening of fathers’ rights and the incentive to share parental leave, and better reconciliation of work, family life and **early infant care**” (Decree-Law 91/2009).
- ✦ **PROFISSIONAL GROUPS (pediatricians):** discourse on the health and well-being of the child (preferable to remain in a “family environment” up to 3 years of age)

“his pediatrician says that the children who are in the crèche need emergency consultations while the children who stay at home only need routine consultations. And with him it’s always been like that, the doctors always say that as far as illness and all that is concerned, it’s better not to put children into crèches too early”. (David)

- ✦ **EMPLOYERS:** defending women’s rights; expectations – long hours, the father does not take leave of absence to take care of the children; differences between public and private sectors, size and type of organization;
- ✦ **GENDER NORMS AND PRACTICES WITHIN THE FAMILY:** both partners in full-time work, inequalities in unpaid work, changing standards (hegemonic masculinity – the father as provider and educator / hegemonic femininity – the mother as main and “natural” carer).

Existing research: Impact of the “Daddy Month(s)” on fathers’ experiences of care and gender roles

- ◆ **A challenge for research....** If fathers spent similarly lengthy periods of time fully engaged/immersed in parenting enhanced parenting skills and sense of responsibility: the opportunity to gain a sense of the “concerns” of parenting, many which are invisible and therefore might go unnoticed by a father who is back at work
- ◆ **A challenge for Family Leave Policy** (e.g. Quebec...)
 - Fathers pointed to policy as an enabling factor in their decision to take leave (well paid “use it or lose it”)
 - Fathers understanding of infant care: focused solely on visible material tasks and physical labor versus responsibility, an invisible form of labor “concerns of parenting”

Parental subsidies granted, with and without sharing of initial parental leave (2010-2013)

	2010	(%)	2011	(%)	2012	(%)	2013	(%)
Shared*	16,361	20.3	16,719	20.6	16,862	22.3	16,560	23.8
Not shared	64,133	79.7	64,581	79.4	58,691	77.7	52,961	76.2
Total	80,494	100	81,300	100	75,553	100	69,521	100
Number of births	101,381		96,856		89,841		82,787	

* Shared leave cases: in which each of the partners took initial parental leave on their own for at least 30 days or for two periods of 15 consecutive days while the other partner went back to work.

Source: Data supplied by the *Instituto de Informática e Estatística da Segurança Social*, 2011-2014

Take-up of the 2 options (150 or 180 days)

	2010	(%)	2011	(%)	2012	(%)	2013	(%)
150 Days	6,949	42.5	6,800	40.7	6,948	41.2	6,726	40.6
180 Days	9,412	57.5	9,919	59.3	9,914	58.8	9,834	59.4
Total	16,361	100	16,719	100	16,862	100	16,560	100

* Shared leave cases in which each of the partners took initial parental leave on their own for at least 30 days or for two periods of 15 consecutive days while the other partner went back to work.

Source: Data supplied by the *Instituto de Informática e Estatística da Segurança social*, 2011-2014