

# Parental leaves and care in Uruguay

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## Context and background

- ◉ Uruguay is moving toward the inclusion of care as the fourth pillar in its social protection system, after health, education and social security. The National Care System instituted in 2015 aims to convert the family-based care model into one in which men and women share responsibility with the State, the marketplace, families and the community.
- ◉ It was in that context that the former leave system was amended to guarantee all private sector workers the right to care.

- ◉ In addition to extending maternity and paternity leave, the main innovation in the new legislation was the introduction of paid (subsidised half-day) voluntary part-time leave, for which either parent is eligible for the first 6 months of the child's life.
- ◉ Part-time leave can be transferred between the parents and the duration divided into alternating periods.

◉ This presentation discusses and analyses the main findings of a **survey on paternity/maternity leave** and gender roles in childcare that explored the use of full- and part-time leaves, the obstacles to their use, the factors affecting decision-making and the perceived costs, among others.

◉ The research aimed to determine the processes involved in parents' decision-making around the use or otherwise of leave and the factors impacted by such use.

◉ It sought identify the factors that favour or hamper mothers' and fathers' use of part-time leave.

## Methodology

- ◉ Nationwide survey (august-october 2017) targeted potential users of the leaves with children under the age of 4.
- ◉ The universe included men and women over 18 from all socioeconomic levels and urban geographies within Uruguay, with paid employment (private sector employees, self-employed, company owners, members of productive cooperatives) paying into social security and with children from 0 to 4 years of age.

# MAIN RESULTS

# Knowledge of leaves

- ◉ The childcare leave-user population studied was nearly universally aware of the existence of maternity (98%) and paternity (94%) leaves and extensively aware of the existence of part-time leaves (88%).
- ◉ However, knowledge of leave duration was less common with only 21% of respondents correctly informed of the 14-week duration of maternity leave and 30% believing that it had not changed from the former 12 weeks.
- ◉ There are lower levels of knowledge in some groups of workers: less educated people, of lower socioeconomic level and who work in elementary occupations, as well as those who work in the construction and agricultural sectors.

## Unsatisfied demand for the duration of leaves

- ◉ Considerable discontent with the present duration of maternity and paternity leaves, an indication that male and female workers' expectations around childcare are unmet by the existing legislation.
- ◉ 7/10 respondents overall considered that maternity leave should be longer, while among women the percentage was 85 %.
- ◉ Most (66 %) of the population also felt that paternity leave should be extended.

- ◉ In contrast to the general opinion across all socioeconomic levels in favour of a longer duration for maternity leave, 6/10 respondents in the lower socioeconomic bracket were amenable to the present duration of paternity leaves.
- ◉ The failure of leave duration provisions to meet user demands leads to the adoption of compensatory strategies to extend parents' post-leave involvement in childcare.
- ◉ A substantial portion of female (40%) and male (30%) private sector workers postponed their return to work by taking their yearly holidays immediately after expiration of their leave time.

## Favorable context for the involvement of males

- ◉ Significant level of agreement on the benefits of the leaves and part time work for the involvement of boys in child care.
- ◉ However, contradiction between the discursive and the practices: while nine out of ten people agree with this innovation, less than 3% of the users of the part time leaves are male.

## Discrimination due to the use of leaves

- ◉ Another limitation to leave use is the perception of possible workplace discrimination against leave-takers. 66% considered that women taking maternity leaves are discriminated against. Such discrimination was regarded as 'severe' by 26% of women.
- ◉ Paternity leave-related discrimination was perceived to be lower (41%), most certainly due to the shorter duration and a favourable attitude toward men's participation in childcare in the first few days after birth.

## Use of leaves

◉Of the three types of leave, maternity leave was the one most commonly used, with an uptake of 96.6 %. Nonetheless, not all women took the time specified in the legislation. Of the respondents eligible for the leave, 83.7 % took the time legally stipulated and 9.5 % took more under arrangements with the employer institution or organisation. In contrast, 3.3 % shortened the time taken and 3.4 % took no time at all

- ◉ Paternity leave was taken by 83 % of eligible men.
- ◉ Age affected the use of paternity leave, with higher rates among younger (18 to 29) than older (40 or over) men (86 vs 50 %).
- ◉ As observed for maternity leaves, paternity leave-taking was somewhat higher among workers in large companies. Men also used such leaves more intensively in feminised companies (larger number of women) or where the male and female headcount was similar. Obstacles to maternity and paternity leave-taking would appear to be greater in masculinised companies.

- ◉ Men's and women's reasons for not using part-time leave differed.
- ◉ Women specified a decline in earnings as the main reason and the adverse effect of their absence from the workplace in the case of women with management responsibilities.
- ◉ Men mentioned breastfeeding and a preference for maternal care where babies are concerned, as might be expected given that the time envisaged concurs with the period recommended for exclusive nursing.

## What happens after the leaves among women?

- ◉ Those of lower socioeconomic and educational level show higher levels of abandonment of employment after the maternity leave has been completed.
- ◉ Those of higher socioeconomic and educational level show a reduction in working hours and changes in working conditions.
- ◉ An important proportion declares to have diminished economic income after the birth of their children

## Final remarks

- ◉The new legislation contains two innovative elements: a lengthening of paternity leave from 3 to 13 days and the institution of part-time leave, for which fathers are eligible.
- ◉Such measures position Uruguay in the regional avant-garde in terms of male caregiving.
- ◉International experience shows, however, that time allotted exclusively to fathers is the most effective avenue for involving men in care. Therefore, slight progress in paternal co-responsibility and redistribution of care can be expected where part-time leave is transferable.

©This research reveals that paternity leave is used intensively and often extended by taking yearly holidays immediately after the time allotted to enable fathers to stay at home for the first month of the infant's life. It also shows that the present provisions on part-time leave, with use restricted to the first 6 months and transferrable between mothers and fathers, are scantily contributing to greater use by men.