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Gender-role attitudes and parental leave decisions: A longitudinal dyadic perspective with dual-earner couples

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Gender-role attitudes and parental work decisions after childbirth: A longitudinal dyadic perspective with dual-earner couples ☆

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Highlights

- Investigation of parents' work decisions with a longitudinal dyadic design
- Use of two independent dyadic data sets
- Mothers with traditional partners take longer maternity leaves after childbirth.
- Mothers with traditional partners decrease working hours to a larger extent.
- Fathers' behavior is not influenced by mothers' attitudes.

Couples' Work & Family Situation

“Linked Lives“ (Elder, 1994)

- Work and family life courses of couples are **interdependent**

**Parental
leave?**

How long?

Both of us?



Gender-Role Attitudes

- Beliefs about ideal behaviors and responsibilities for men and women (Eagly, 1987)

traditional ←————→ egalitarian

- Traditional attitudes: **male breadwinner/female homemaker model**

- Closely related to **ideals about the mother role:**

- Central caregiver
- Maternal employment → harmful to the child's development

(cf. Sieverding, 1990)

Gender-Role Attitudes & Parental Leave Decisions

Past research

Individual level:

- Women with traditional attitudes were more likely to interrupt their labor force participation after childbirth (Glass & Riley, 1998)
- Less traditional fathers rather made use of parental leave and took longer leaves (Duvander, 2014; Hyde, Essex, & Horton, 1993; Vogt & Pull, 2010)

Couple level:

- In retrospect, couples' attitudes were important for decisions on parental leave (Neumann & Meuser, 2017; Peukert, 2015)

Present research

Longitudinal dyadic perspective

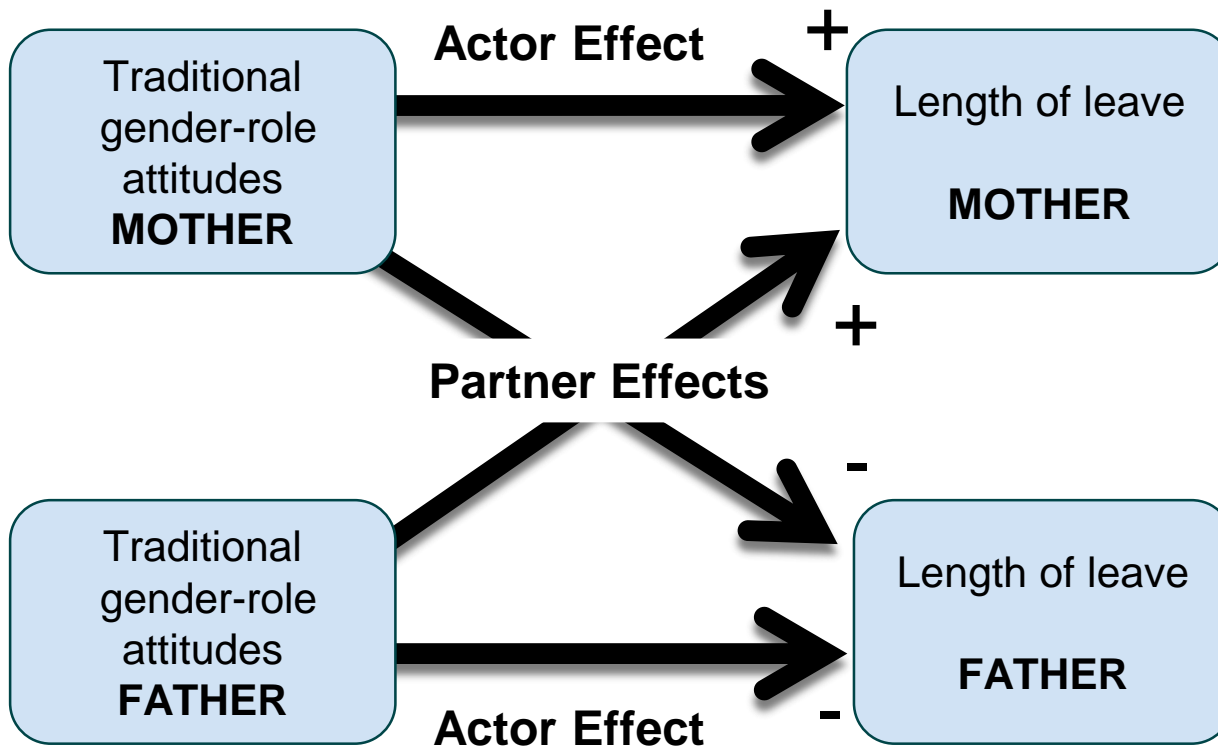


Mothers' and fathers' attitudes



Mothers' and fathers' leave decisions

Analytical approach & hypotheses

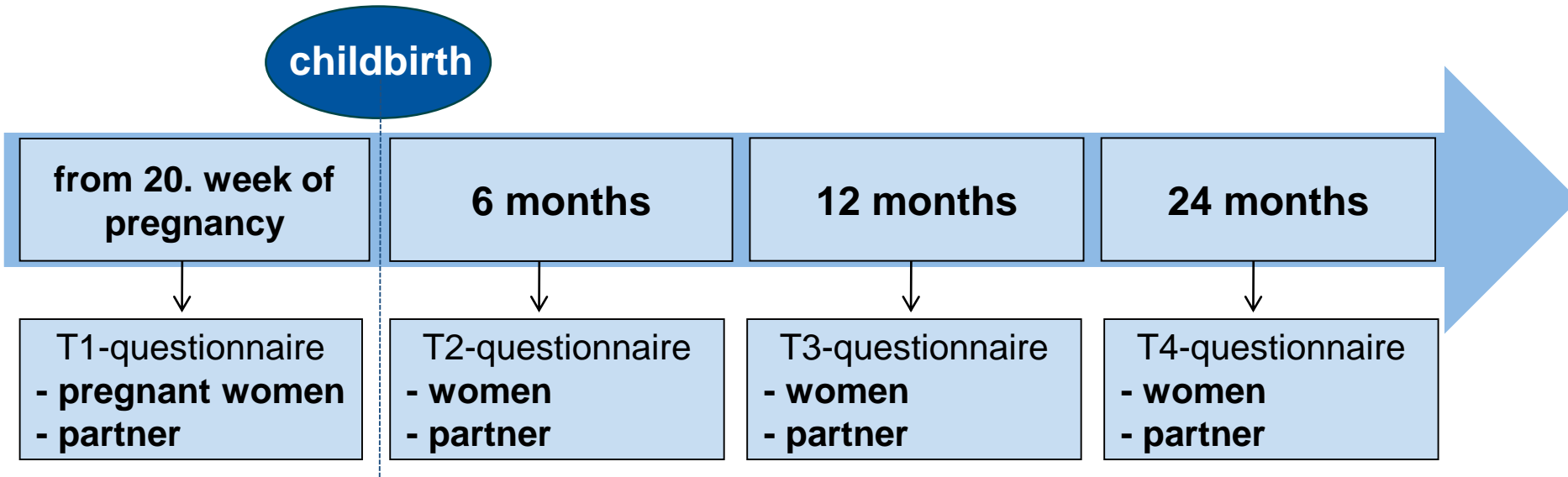


Actor-Partner-Interdependence Model (APIM; Kenny, Kashy, & Cook, 2006)

Study Design & Sample

Project: Expectant parents' career and family plans (PI: Bettina S. Wiese)

childbirth



N = 138 couples

CH: 54 %; D: 45 %; AU: 1 %

73 % first parenthood

≥ 50 % university degree

Relationship duration (in years): $M = 7.59$; $SD = 3.90$

Married: 78.7 %

Shared household: 98.6 %

Measures

Gender-role attitudes (Sieverding, 1990)

- 4 Items; 6-point Likert scale (1 = *not at all*, 6 = *very much*)
e.g., “A child of preschool age is likely to suffer if his mother is working.”

Mothers: $M = 3.03$; $SD = 1.16$; $\alpha = .70$

Fathers: $M = 3.30$; $SD = 1.11$; $\alpha = .78$

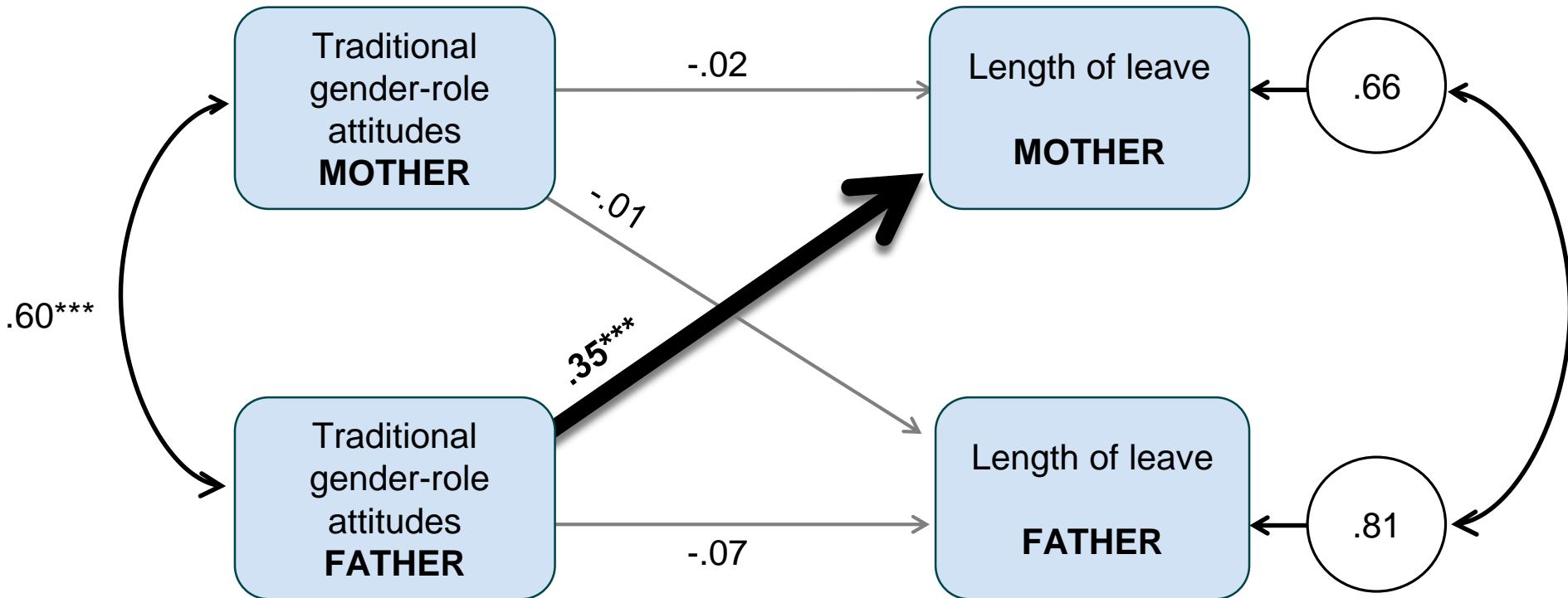
Length of leave

- Mothers: difference (1st day back at work – child’s birthday)
- Fathers: sum of leave days at T2/T3/T4

Mothers: $M = 11.65$ months; $SD = 10.45$

Fathers: $M = 38$ days; $SD = 53.61$



Results



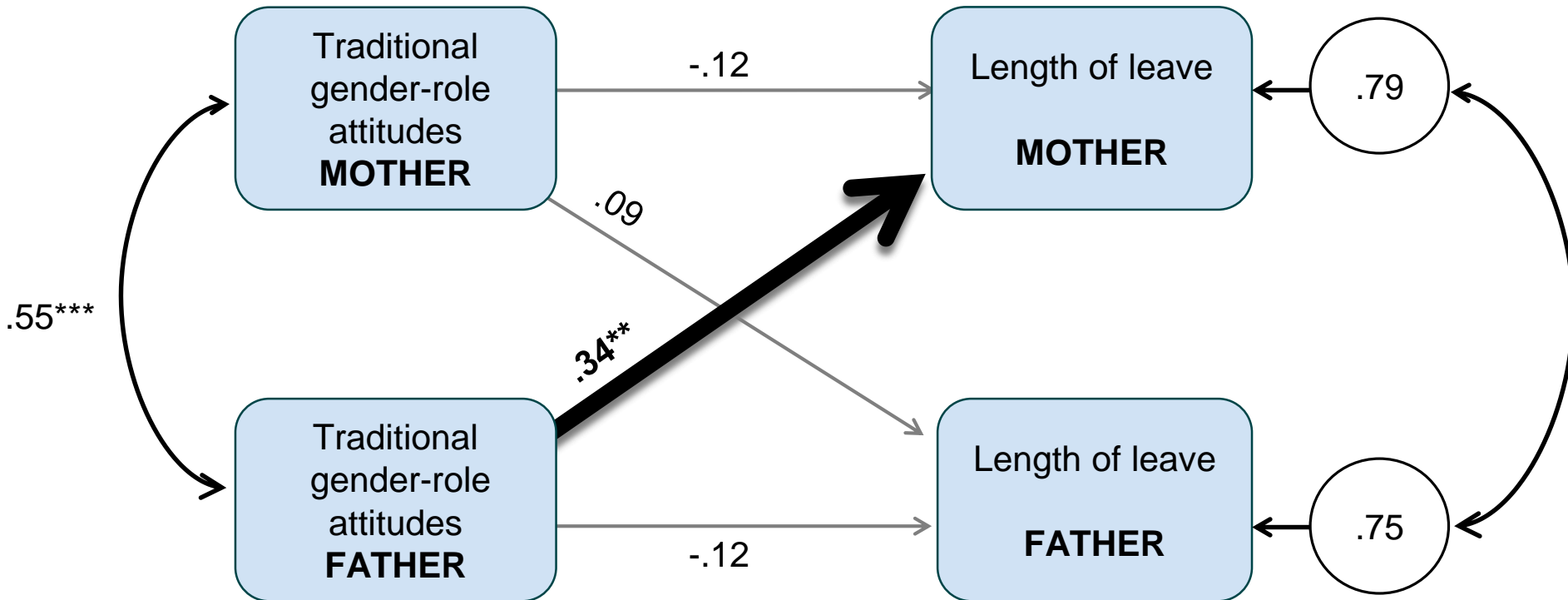
Control variables: country of residence, couple's income, first parenthood, mother's educational level, father's educational level, mother's prenatal working hours, father's prenatal working hours, main earner (i.e., higher paternal income, higher maternal income, equal income)

*** $p < .001$, ** $p < .01$, * $p < .05$.

Additional Analysis

	<i>M (SD)</i>	<i>M (SD)</i>
	 <i>n = 62</i>	 <i>n = 75</i>
Gender-role attitudes Mothers	2.97 (1.15)	3.06 (1.18)
Gender-role attitudes Fathers	3.01 (1.05)	3.52 (1.11)
Length of leave (in months) Mothers	15.36 (10.67)	8.46 (9.25)
Length of leave (in months) Fathers	1.84 (2.06)	.78 (1.30)
	≈ 56 days	≈ 24 days

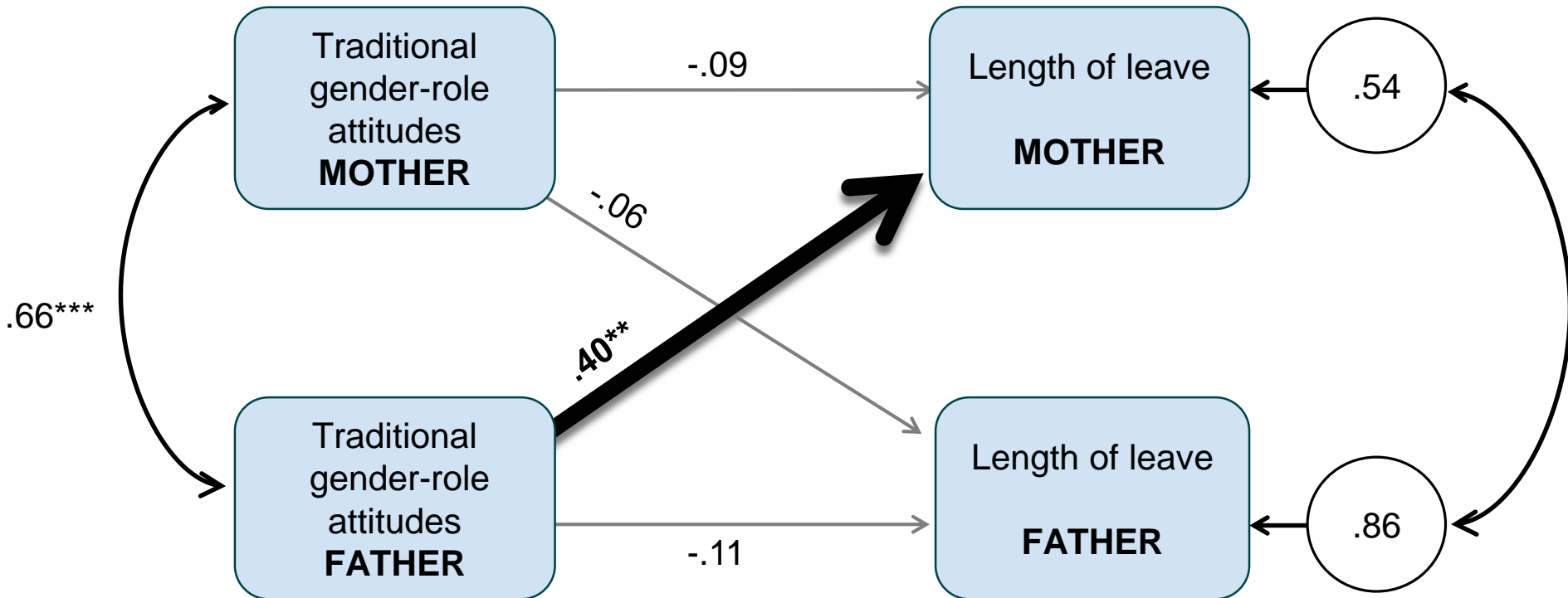
Results – Subsample



Control variables: couple's income, first parenthood, mother's educational level, father's educational level, mother's prenatal working hours, father's prenatal working hours, main earner (i.e., higher paternal income, higher maternal income, equal income)

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Results – Subsample



Control variables: couple's income, first parenthood, mother's educational level, father's educational level, mother's prenatal working hours, father's prenatal working hours, main earner (i.e., higher paternal income, higher maternal income, equal income)

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Discussion

Main findings

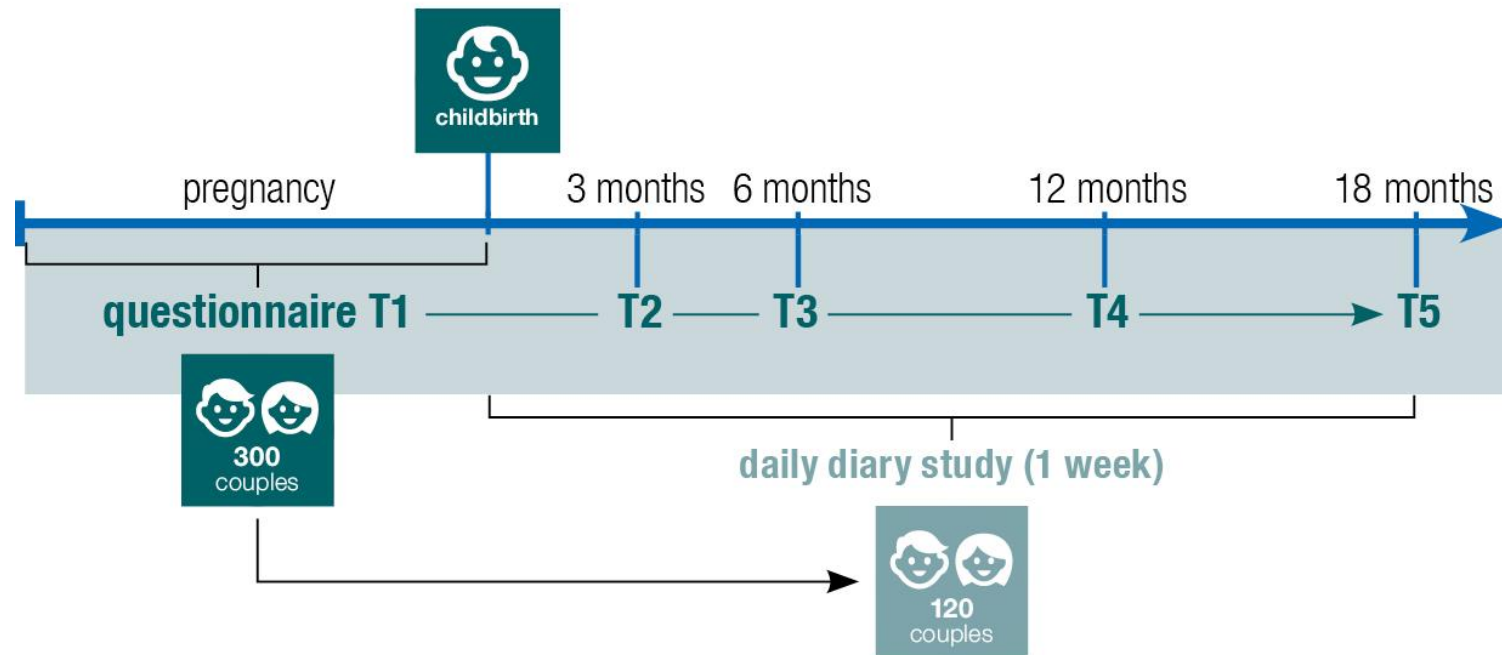
Mothers' parental leave decisions are influenced by their partners' gender-role attitudes, not vice versa.

When considering both parents' attitudes simultaneously, the preferences of the partner have a stronger impact on mothers' decisions than their own preferences.

Explanatory approaches

- The birth of a child is more life-changing for mothers than for fathers
 - new situation causes insecurity → orientation in line with the partner's attitudes might be helpful
- Women are expected to be sensitive toward the needs of their family members (i.e., communal), men to behave in an independent way (i.e., agentic)

Current research project: Couples' parental leave decisions and experiences:
A dyadic perspective on gender-role influences



Sample:

> 300 heterosexual dual-earner couples who are expecting their first child at T1

Thank you very much for your attention!

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