

# TOWARDS GENDER EQUALITY IN PARENTING? A COMPARATIVE ANALYSIS OF PARENTAL LEAVE AND CHILD SUPPORT SCHEMES

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## BACKGROUND

Parental leave policies: key role in facilitating transition towards dual-earner/dual-carer societies

Policy improvements, yet shared parenting a long way off

Key mechanism sustaining gender inequality: complex family policy landscapes / policy interplay

## BACKGROUND (II)

### Shared parenting? Family policies (e.g. leave) and child support

- Parental leave targets couples; yet one in two marriages ends in divorce.

### Relationship dissolution? Need to negotiate parenting roles and responsibilities

- Potential for shared parenting as well as gender unequal parenting.

### Limited evidence (Claessens and Mortelmans, 2018) suggests family policies (e.g. parental leave policies) can be inconsistent with child support schemes.

- Study based on 2012 categorization of family policies
- Recent developments in leave policies – changing policy landscape

# OUR AIMS

Shared parenting=gender equality?

To what extent are policy principles of gender equality in parenting maintained when relationships dissolve?

To evaluate shared parenting across multiple policy domains in two European countries (UK/NL)

Identify coherence and tensions among policy domains, evaluating what this means for gender equality in parenting



## SHARED PARENTING?

- Concept of shared parenting unclear
  - Academic definition
  - Policy definition
- Equality in what:
  - **Access to policy instruments?**
  - Time?
  - Types of care?
  - Subjective perceptions?
- Equality when...
  - Parents are together (in a relationship)
  - Parents are separated (relationship dissolution)



FAMILY POLICY  
AND SHARED  
PARENTING

- Family policies, e.g. parental leave /child support, play a key role in creating the conditions for shared parenting (Javornik 2014: 247; Kurowska, 2016; Javornik and Kurowska, 2017; Yerkes et al., 2019).
- Yet policy landscapes more complex than generally recognized (Javornik and Oliver, 2019; Yerkes et al., 2019)
- Interaction of policy domains important for what individuals are able to do/be (*capabilities*) – also in relation to shared parenting

CAPABILITY FOR  
SHARED  
PARENTING

Capabilities

Functionings: valued, achieved

Means

Conversion factors

Agency

Sources: Sen, 1992, 1999; Robeyns, 2005, 2017; Kurowska, 2017; Kurowska and Javornik, 2019; Yerkes, Javornik and Kurowska, 2019.



POLICY  
LANDSCAPE  
UK:  
PARENTING  
WHEN  
PARENTS  
TOGETHER

- Children and Families Act (2014) and Shared Parental Leave (SPL; 2014, available since 2015)
  - Fathers could previously access ‘additional paternity leave’ via mothers
  - SPL similar: mothers can ‘share’ maternity leave with fathers
  - Pay is arranged separately (Shared Parental Pay), with different entitlements and definitions





POLICY  
LANDSCAPE  
UK:  
PARENTING  
WHEN  
PARENTS  
SEPARATE

- Children and Families Act (2014) – also consequences for divorced couples
  - Consideration of 50/50 care presumption (not enacted); involvement of both parents in best interest of child
  - Rather: ‘loose endorsement’ of idea of shared parenting
  - Emphasis on individual/private arrangements
- Cuts to public services (incl. legal aid), so diminishing families’ abilities to get help in making post-separation parenting arrangements
- Child Maintenance Service (replaced Child Support Agency; 2014)
  - Withdrawal of the state



POLICY  
LANDSCAPE  
NL:  
PARENTING  
WHEN  
PARENTS  
TOGETHER

- Modernization of Leave and Working Time (2015)
  - Fathers/partners 3 extra days; expansion of rights for adjustment of working hours; more flexibility in take-up of parental leave (when, duration, etc).
- No discussion of shared parenting / gender equality
  - Policy sees leave as part of employer relationship; legislation plays a facilitating role
- Birth Leave (2019)
  - Replaces/extends paternity leave: 1 week paid, no ceiling
  - An extra 5 paid weeks available from 1 July 2020
  - Equal sharing of work and care explicitly mentioned in legislation

Sources: Yerkes and Den Dulk, 2015; Den Dulk and Yerkes, 2019; Memorie van Toelichting, 2019.



POLICY  
LANDSCAPE  
NL:  
PARENTING  
WHEN  
PARENTS  
SEPARATE

- Joint legal custody long history in NL: introduced 1998; sole custody an exception
- Promotion of Continued Parenting and Proper Divorce Act (2009)
  - Children whose parents have joint legal custody: “the right to equal care and upbringing by both parents” (Poortman and van Galen, 2017: 532; Staatsblad 2008)
  - 50-50 care is encouraged but not required (Nikolina, 2015)

Sources: Poortman and van Galen, 2017: 532; Staatsblad 2008; Nikolina, 2015.



## SHARED PARENTING?

- Leave take-up:
  - UK: no national statistics. Take up of SPL estimated 2-8%
  - NL: no statistics yet on newest leave forms, but:
    - 86% of eligible fathers took paternity leave in 2017
    - More fathers take holidays/paid annual leave
    - 22% of mothers vs 11% of fathers take parental leave (average duration 14 vs 19 months respectively)

Sources: O'Brien and Koslowski, 2018; den Dulk and Yerkes, 2019.

## SHARED PARENTING?

		<b>2006</b>	<b>2011</b>	<b>2016</b>
<b>Netherlands</b>	Fathers	6.1 hours	5.8 hours	6.2 hours
	Mothers	10.7 hours	8.4 hours	9.8 hours
<b>UK*</b>	Fathers			1.9 hours
	Mothers			4.7 hours

Source: Roeters, 2017; ONS/HETUS, 2015.

\*Data are for 2015.



SHARED  
PARENTING  
(DIVORCED  
PARENTS)

- UK:
  - Less than 1% of children in 50-50 care
  - ‘Shared care’ between 3 and 7% (Haux et al., 2017)
- NL:
  - Anywhere between 20-28% of parents choose for ‘co-parenting’/shared residence (Poortman & van Galen, 2017; Portegijs & van den Brakel, 2018)



## PRELIMINARY CONCLUSIONS

- Family policy: complex and interrelated sets of policies with potential to facilitate gender equality in parenting
  - Conceptualisation of shared parenting remains unclear
- Shared parenting ideals rhetorically promoted in parental leave and child support policies
  - Significant policy reforms in UK and NL show evidence of shared parenting ideals
  - Parental leave explicit about ‘shared’ parenting – but parents’ choice
  - Child support explicit about ‘shared’ parenting (NL) but not 50-50; UK ‘loose endorsement’ of idea
- Parents capabilities for shared parenting restricted
  - Particularly when accounting for socio-economic differences



## MOVING FORWARD

- Work in progress
- Claessens and Mortelmans (2018) highlight a crucial gap in our understanding of gender equality in parenting
- But need for nuanced understanding of family policy context
  - Underlying policy principles
  - What this means for parents' capabilities for shared parenting within these contexts



THANK  
YOU!

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