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

Mara A. Yerkes
Laura den Dulk
Jana Javornik

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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
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 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
Capabilities

Functionings: valued, achieved

Means

Conversion factors

Agency

• 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

Source: Javornik and Oliver, 2019.
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

Source: Haux et al., 2017.
• 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.
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)

• 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?

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<td><strong>Netherlands</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td>Fathers</td>
<td>6.1 hours</td>
<td>5.8 hours</td>
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<td>10.7 hours</td>
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<td><strong>UK</strong>*</td>
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<tr>
<td>Fathers</td>
<td>1.9 hours</td>
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<td>Mothers</td>
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<td>4.7 hours</td>
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*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)
• 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
• 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!

Keep in touch:

• Mara: M.A.Yerkes@uu.nl
• Laura: dendulk@essb.eur.nl
• Jana: J.Javornik@Leeds.ac.uk

🌐: www.worklifecapabilities.com

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