

**21ST INTERNATIONAL NETWORK ON LEAVE  
POLICIES AND RESEARCH ANNUAL SEMINAR**

**REIMAGINING CARE/WORK  
POLICIES ACROSS THE  
LIFE COURSE:  
PARENTAL LEAVES, CARE LEAVES,  
CHILDCARE, AND EMPLOYMENT  
POLICIES**

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Université TÉLUQ  
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Réinventer  
les politiques  
soins/travail

Reimagining  
care/work  
Policies

**ABSTRACTS**

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# SESSION 1: CARE/WORK POLICIES IN QUÉBEC & CANADA

## Care/Work Policies in Québec and Canada

Sophie Mathieu (Vanier Institute of the Family, Canada)

Diane-Gabrielle Tremblay (Université TÉLUQ, Canada)

Andrea Doucet (Brock University, Canada)

Lindsey McKay (Thompson Rivers University, Canada)

Martha Friendly (Childcare Resource and Research Unit, Canada)

Susan Prentice (University of Manitoba, Canada)

As a federal system, Canada has a complex policy architecture of different provincial, territorial and federal jurisdictions over the key care/work policies and services (including childcare, parental leaves, and care leaves). Québec is known for having an innovative parental leave policy since 2006, including paternity leave. This session brings together a group of experts with experience in research on these issues. We share lessons learned to date on the progress, pitfalls, and politics of developing inclusive and equitable childcare and parental leaves for diverse populations in Québec and Canada.

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# SESSION 2: NORDIC COUNTRIES

## Division of work and care among parents in Iceland in the 21st century

Ásdís A. Arnalds (University of Iceland)

Guðný Björk Eydal (University of Iceland)

Ingólfur V. Gíslason (University of Iceland)

Iceland enacted a parental leave law providing both parents with three months of non-transferable leave in 2000. In 2021 the non-transferable parts for each parent were extended to 4.5 months. We will present findings from five repeated cross-national surveys on how parents arrange childcare and work during the first three years after childbirth, to explore if and how the introduction and the expansion of the non-transferable period had an impact on parental practices in Iceland. The first survey reached parents who had their first child before non-transferability was introduced, while the latest survey reaches parents of children born in 2021, after the extension of the non-transferable period for parents.

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## Partial leave as a solution for work-family tensions in families with young children in Finland

Johanna Lammi-Taskula (Finnish Institute for Health and Welfare, Finland)

Anneli Miettinen (The Social Insurance Institution of Finland, Finland)

Johanna Närvi (National Institute for Health and Welfare, Finland)

Part-time work is often seen as a solution to reconcile work and family life when children are young (Beham et al 2019; Van Breechoten & Evertsson 2019). In addition to full-time leave, statutory policy in Finland includes measures that support part-time work for parents of young children. Since 1988, parents have had a right to partial childcare leave with a low flat-rate allowance after parental leave until the child turns three, and in 2003 a part-time option for parental leave was introduced. Since 2014, a flexible childcare benefit to support part-time employment has been available and in the 2022 reform the part-time use of parental leave was made more flexible (Närvi et al 2022). Despite these policies being available to all employed parents, previous research shows that part-time options are more often used by families with better socioeconomic resources, effectively increasing disparities in the reconciliation opportunities across social strata. Part-time work has not been very common in Finland, but during the past decades it has become somewhat more typical (Pyöriä et al 2019). However, the most common reasons for working part-time are studying or part-time pension rather than childcare (Statistics Finland 2023). In 2021, less than ten per cent of children in the respective age group were taken care of with the flexible care allowance or partial care allowance, and the use of the partial parental leave was practically non-existent (Lammi-Taskula et al 2023). In the paper, we present findings from a 2022 survey with parents of young children (aged 1-2) in Finland.



We intersectionally analyse the frequency of part-time work and the obstacles for not choosing part-time work according to various sociodemographic characteristics and explore whether experiences of work-family tensions are related to these choices. Based on the results, we evaluate the future impact of the latest leave reform and discuss the need to further develop the flexibility of leave and childcare policies.

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# SESSION 3: CELEBRATING OUR MEMBERS' BOOKS: A FOCUS ON QUÉBEC AND AUSTRALIA

## Égalité, fécondité et maternité: Le soutien aux familles au Québec

Sophie Mathieu (Vanier Institute of the Family, Canada)

Cet ouvrage analyse les tendances liées à la reproduction sociale, la fécondité et l'égalité entre les femmes et les hommes au Québec, en adoptant une perspective historique et comparative qui s'étend de 1960 à 2010. Il met en lumière le rôle essentiel de l'égalité entre les sexes dans la prévention d'une chute draconienne de la fécondité. Pour étayer sa thèse, l'autrice mobilise un concept inédit, celui de la « dématernalisation » des soins, visant à soulager les mères d'une partie du travail de reproduction sociale, notamment les soins aux enfants. L'ouvrage montre que la politique de 1997, Les enfants au coeur de nos choix, axée sur la conciliation entre travail et famille, a eu un effet bien plus important sur la fécondité que la politique nataliste de 1988. Ce livre suscitera incontestablement de nombreux débats au sein de la communauté universitaire et au-delà, en raison de sa portée qui dépasse largement les études habituelles focalisées sur des aspects spécifiques tels les services de garde. Un ouvrage qui intéressera autant les chercheurs que les intervenants ainsi que tous les parents actuels et à venir..

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## At a Turning Point: Work, care and family policies in Australia

Marian Baird (Sydney University, Australia)

Australia is at a much-needed turning point in work, care and family policy. Australian women, families and communities are struggling to manage the complex demands of work and care. Rapid social and demographic change, alongside new workplace, labour market trends and the aftermath of the COVID-19 pandemic, requires a policy revamp that will allow all Australians to work, care and be cared for. In seven chapters authored by leading scholars in the field, *At a Turning Point: Work, care and family policies in Australia* provides a comprehensive account of key policy areas that shape the experience of work and care across the life course. These include reproductive wellbeing, paid parental leave, early childhood education and care, flexible work, elder and disability care, and equitable systems of tax and transfer payments. *At a Turning Point* argues that a new social contract that puts gender equality, economic security and the well-being of carers and those they care for at the centre of policy design is essential to national productivity and prosperity. It is the foundation of a good society.

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# SESSION 4: SOCIAL INCLUSION AND LEAVES ACROSS THE LIFE COURSE: WHO BENEFITS FROM PAID LEAVES?

## High expectations: Paid parental leave changes in Australia

Marian Baird (Sydney University, Australia)

Jenny Baxter (Australian Institute of Family Studies, Australia)

Myra Hamilton (The University of Sydney, Australia)

Australia's paid parental leave scheme has recently undergone significant change. From 1<sup>st</sup> July 2023, 20 weeks paid parental leave is available to be shared by parents of a newborn or adopted child (with 20 weeks available to sole parents). Two weeks is reserved for each parent and the leave can be taken flexibly, in units of one day, for the first two years of the child's life. By 2026, 26 weeks paid parental leave with 4 weeks reserved for each parent will be available. The intent of the changes is to make parenting more gender equitable, encourage fathers to take more parental leave and enable mothers to engage more with the paid workforce. Drawing on qualitative and quantitative data collected before the changes were introduced the paper will consider the implications of the revised scheme and its potential effect on parenting gender equity.

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## Effects of inclusiveness of parental leave scheme on work-life balance: Self-employed fathers in Japan in comparative perspective

Hideki Nakazato (Konan University, Japan)

In recent years, improving work-life balance has become an important theme in Japanese society, particularly in terms of changing working styles, including the uptake of parental leave by men. However, the scope of eligibility of the related policies is very limited. This presentation compares the situation of child-rearing and work-life balance of fathers working as entrepreneurs or self-employed in Japan with the findings of previous studies in countries with more inclusive parental leave systems (e.g. Sweden, Germany and Australia), where self-employed parents are eligible. This is a preliminary study that contributes to the objective of exploring the direction of revision of Japan's parental leave system and, at the same time, provides material for examining the effects of inclusiveness of the parental leave policy.

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## Social Policy for Optimists: the social sustainability perspective as applied to parental leave policies

Alison Koslowski (UCL, UK)

Human societies have been able to take the long view, for example, medieval cathedrals took generations to complete. Yet, as social scientists and policy makers of our time, we have a poor track record in taking the long view, which means that meeting the needs of people today has potentially been to the detriment of future



generations (United Nations, 1987). Social sustainability is one of three pillars of sustainable development, but arguably the least developed of the pillars (Boström, 2012). The concept recognises the key role of social policy in creating human societies capable of caring for and sustaining the planet.

How might we rethink social policies in order to build better and support more sustainable ways of living? Arguably, the UN's sustainable development goals are an influential attempt in this direction (Bandola-Gill, Grek & Tichenor, 2022). Care is possibly the central social concept that can 'bridge' the gulf between environmental sustainability and social sustainability. There is increasing understanding that we must care for our environment. Care is integral to our humanity, and yet historically we have not been particularly successful in articulating its role in that which sustains us and our societies. This paper takes the example of a particular social policy area: care leave policies and considers how they might be differently considered through a social sustainability lens.

This paper will form part of a chapter in the forthcoming Care, Leave Policies, and Social Sustainability throughout the Life Course Editors: Alison Koslowski, Ann-Zofie Duvander, Andrea Doucet which is supported by EU Cost Action CA21150 – Parental Leave Policies and Social Sustainability.



# SESSION 5: GENDER EQUALITY AND LEAVES

## Work Schedule of Female Employees and Leave Policies in Private Universities in Nigeria

Adeyinka Oladayo Bankole (Bowen University, Nigeria)

The condition of work in public and private organisations are different in the capitalist systems, and the situation is more pronounced in the developing world. In the last two decades, privately owned universities established by leading religious organisations and individual entrepreneurs have sprung up in Nigeria. Unlike in public universities, the work schedule and workload in these private universities is huge. Using questionnaire and in-depth interview, this paper provides empirical data on work schedule and workloads of female employees – academic and non-academic – in selected private universities in Nigeria. The paper critically analyses leave policies in these universities and how they impact on the wellbeing of female employees. Recommendations are made towards promoting the wellbeing of staff and the organisations.

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## Parental Leave and Gender Equality in Lithuania: towards a more equal uptake of parental leave among the parents in Lithuania

Rūta Brazienė (Vilnius University, Lithuania)

Sonata Vyšniauskienė (Lithuanian Social Science Centre, Lithuania)

In this study parental leave policy and employment policy developments from a gender equality perspective are examined in Lithuania (2018-2023). This paper is assessing the impact on father's uptake of parental leave in a new policy framework. In particular, the study focuses on the current transformations related to the implementation of the EU Work-life Balance Directive (2019) and two non-transferable months per parent. A newest leave policy reform came into effect on January, 1<sup>st</sup> 2023. The study focuses on how implementation of this directive is changing patterns of parental leave choices among parents in Lithuania. The study is based on the administrative data of Social Insurance Fund Board, Lithuanian Statistical agency data that covers the period of 2018-2023 and semi structured interviews with the experts (public sector, NGOs, parents' organizations).

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## Changes in the gendered use of parental leave compared with other care leaves across the life course in Belgium: similarities or differences

Bernard Fusulier (Université Catholique de Louvain, Belgium)

Laurène Thil (HIVA - KU Leuven, Belgium)

Based on Belgian administrative data spanning from 2004 to 2022, we will present parental leave use as a reference point. Subsequently, we will inquire whether the use patterns of other types of leaves (focused on caregiving for close relatives, medical assistance, palliative care, and career breaks) exhibit a similar trend of gradual and still somewhat uneven convergence between women and men.

Despite the availability of these leaves to both genders, our analysis demonstrates that women are more inclined to make use of them. Nevertheless, with the exception of palliative care and medical assistance leaves, as well as career breaks, the data indicates a consistent reduction in the disparity between men and women, suggesting a slow and gradual shift in social norms toward less gender inequality.

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# SESSION 6: REMOTE SESSION 1: LEAVE POLICIES AND GENDER EQUALITY: CASE STUDIES FROM EUROPE

## Care Credits in pension schemes: comparing EU Member States in the context of the EU Work-Life Balance Directive

David Natali (University of Bologna, Italy)

Barbara Janta (Risk & Policy Analysts Ltd.)

Slavina Spasova (European Social Observatory, Belgium)

The objective of this paper is to outline whether and how the regulatory frameworks related to leave periods across EU Member States have impact on the provision of care credits during leave periods and on the pension gender gap. Pension gender gap – that is the difference between the average man’s pension and the average women’s pension - is a major issue in the actual debate on pension reforms across Europe. The pension gender gap is mainly the result of the gender pay gap, of non-standard work (leading to less generous contributory periods) and care periods. Our paper is part of an exploratory qualitative project delivered for the European Commission DG EMPL assessing the situation across EU Member States. The project focuses on examining the capacity of statutory and occupational pensions to allocate care credits to workers during care leave activities related to childcare and long-term care. Applying a case study approach, our comparative analysis provide evidence on pension care credits across EU



Member States and shed light on the influence of the EU Work Life Balance Directive on the care leave and care credit provisions in five Member States, namely Belgium, Denmark, the Netherlands, Spain and Sweden. The issue at stake currently represents a niche in the debate of pension rights in Europe, but it is relevant in that it addresses questions such as the origin of gender differences in access to social protection, and the complex interplay between national laws and collective agreements in setting social rights for workers.

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## No backlash: Gender equality in Iceland

Ingólfur V. Gíslason (University of Iceland)

Ásdís A. Arnalds (University of Iceland)

The 21<sup>st</sup> century has seen the gender gaps in Iceland reduced in most or all areas. The gender pay gap has been reduced, political power positions are more equally shared than ever, the gap in cultural stipends and prices is less than ever and fathers have greatly increased their participation in caretaking. Similarly, opinion polls indicate a strong commitment to gender equality among the general public. In order to see whether the changes are real we conducted an experiment where a panel judged statement from “experts”. The main results are that the gender of the “experts” did not matter regarding their trustworthiness. Other similar experiments have shown similar results, gender is not an issue when statements or CVs are judged.

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## Empirical evidence on shared parental leave in Austria: Pathways for shared parenting?

Gerlinde Mauerer (University of Vienna, Austria)

The planned presentation includes interim results of the current research on "Gender and Family in Motion. Parental Arrangements". In a second empirical wave, I conducted follow-up interviews with 39 interviewees, who had earlier participated in couple interviews. Against the background of Austria being a conservative welfare state and facing challenges in establishing infant care, I want to discuss obstacles in going beyond gendered role stereotypes and establishing long-term shared parenting arrangements. The empirical results show that the provision of well-paid, shorter childcare benefits on one hand promotes men's uptake of parental leave, however, on the other hand it includes obstacles in overcoming gender inequalities in both parents' reconciliation of employment, childcare and family management, due to employers gendered expectations and due to a lack in the provision of (public) childcare and education.

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## Matthew and Matilda effects of gender-neutral parenting leave designs at birth

Anna Escobedo (University of Barcelona, Spain)

Different understandings of gender equality in parenting leave designs have diverse impacts in different welfare, care or gender regimes. So what do we mean by gender equality in parenting leaves design? The main contribution is to discuss and conceptualise Matthew and Matilda effects of the 2019 Spanish intended gender-neutral reform in leave regulation around birth, in the framework of



contributory schemes and benefits, while at the same time acknowledging for its transformative potential. The Spanish case is discussed using national qualitative and quantitative data, OECD and Eurostat Data in the framework of present European debates on de-gendering the use of parental leave arrangements, comparative innovation and research on leave arrangements, in connection to the deployment of the 2019 EU Directive on Work-Life Balance. The Spanish case corresponds to a familiaristic welfare regime where generous provision for families has not yet been developed, nor in time nor coverage, and thus allows to expand the international discussion to countries with maternal early-return to work leave models, and beyond countries that have previously developed more generous schemes in terms of time extension and coverage.

# SESSION 7: REMOTE SESSION 2: LEAVE POLICIES IN EUROPE: METHODOLOGICAL, THEORETICAL, CONCEPTUAL AND/OR POLICY DESIGN ISSUES

## Gender, generations, and Parental Leave Schemes in Romania

Raluca Popescu (University of Bucharest, Romania)

The family policy measures in Romania disclose an incoherent model, with a conservative regulatory framework, a minor financial effort, and a lack of services for children, but with generous leave schemes. However, this public support for childcare in the first years of life is selective and dual. If working parents are supported by a substantial support scheme in money and time, at least for the first 2 years of life, unemployed parents do not have access to any kind of cash-for-care equivalent, thus widening economic inequalities between families with low and high incomes, between Roma and ethnic majority, between rural and urban areas. At the same time, family policy is quite poor in terms of objectives. It does not consider diverse family models, it does not pay attention to the various aspects that fall within its scope, such as gender issues, work flexibility or the relationship between work and care. Using secondary data analysis on statistical indicators and legislative or formal documents, this paper aims to find out for whom and what kind of benefits truly provide paid leaves in Romania, in an EU comparative context.

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## Conceptual and methodological challenges in comparing work-care policies

Ivana Dobrotić (University of Zagreb, Croatia)

The paper highlights the conceptual and methodological complexities associated with the comparative analysis of care leaves (including parenting leaves and carers' leave) and flexible working arrangements from an inequalities perspective, especially those arising from the layered character of care rights development, their multi-layered (and ambiguous) nature, and the absence of coherent care policies and clear conceptualisation of care policies in comparative research. By critically examining work-care policies in six countries included in the rEUsilience project: Belgium, Croatia, Poland, Spain, Sweden, and the UK, the paper demonstrates how the complexity of terminology used, the eligibility criteria, as well as the complex interrelationship of different policy dimensions and policies create inequalities in the distribution of resources for care arrangements of different groups of parents/carers that are difficult to capture. When the policies are looked at more deeply, it is evident that migrant families, "modern" families, and/or families with weak or atypical connections to the labour market are particularly affected.

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## Online Mapping Tool for analysing leave policy development

Gerardo Meil (Universidad Autonoma de Madrid, Spain)

Pedro Romero-Balsas (Universidad Autonoma de Madrid, Spain)

Presentation of the online mapping tool developed within the Cost Action 21150 "[Parental Leave Policies and Social Sustainability](#)" funded by the European Union.



The mapping tool is based on the comparative tables of the Annual Review published since 2005 by the Leave Network. The presentation will be centered, first, on the added value of this mapping tool compared to other similar tools as the one of the International Labour Organization and the different possibilities to compare policy characteristics over countries in a given year, and/or over time. Second, the main developments in leave policy during the period covered by the Annual Review will be presented.

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## Supporting fatherhood: An analysis with the FamLens® model

Sara Mazzucchelli (Catholic University of Milan, Italy)

Dino Giovannini (University of Modena and Reggio Emilia, Italy)

Tindara Addabbo (University of Modena and Reggio Emilia, Italy)

Valentina Cardinali (National Institute for the Analysis of Public Policies, Italy)

Fathers' involvement in childcare is a topic of great importance in scientific research on family and child development. Numerous studies have investigated the effect of paternal involvement on the well-being of children, mothers, and fathers themselves. Indeed, the literature suggests that children with involved fathers show better emotional and behavioral health. Paternal involvement is associated with better social-emotional development, higher self-esteem, and better school performance. Mothers with involved partners tend to experience greater relationship satisfaction, and shared caregiving, resulting in reduced stress, and better mental health. Finally, paternal involvement may also result in fathers experiencing greater satisfaction in family life and in their relationship with



their children, contributing positively to a better balance between work and family. In this context, what is the role and influence of leave legislation? What kind of leave policies best respond to the needs of workers and companies and promote gender and social equality? This presentation aims to briefly illustrate the path made in recent years by Italian leave policies as related to fathers, analyzing the impact of policies and interventions on the well-being of families through the FamILens® model, developed by the Family Studies and Research University Centre of the Catholic University of Milan on the basis of the Family Impact Lens, elaborated by the Family Impact Institute (Purdue University, West Lafayette, Indiana). Space will also be devoted to the analysis of utilization rates and as well as key issues related to implementation to better understand what may be hindering or facilitating factors.

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## What Do We Measure When We Measure Fathers' Leave Take-up?

Merve Uzunalioglu (University of Oxford, England)

Youngcho Lee (London School of Economics and Political Science)

In recent decades, fathers' parental leave policies have gained momentum across Europe, with Nordic countries leading the way in implementing innovative approaches such as 'daddy months' and gender-neutral leave. This evolution in policy has sparked scholarly interest in understanding its impact, particularly in care work distribution, household responsibilities, maternal employment, gender pay equity, children's well-being, and parental mental health. However, existing literature primarily relies on cross-sectional data, offering correlational insights but lacking causal understanding. What is measured as fathers' leave and their



consequences often vary significantly across studies. Hence, there appears to be a need to discuss the issues around measurement and comparability. This article addresses three key challenges in measuring the effects of fathers' parental leave. The first challenge identified is the variations in policy definitions. The second challenge is based on the heterogeneities driven by the data availability or lack thereof. The last concern is the diversities in measures and conceptualisations. Drawing on multiple data sources, such as the Annual Leave Review and OECD Family Database, as well as a review of the literature for the period covering the post-Council Directive 2010/18/EU, this article systematically examines these challenges. This study contributes to ongoing discussions on the complexities of conceptualising fathers' parental leave. Building upon previous works by Doucet and Duvander (2022) and addressing concerns highlighted by Otto et al. (2021), we aim to advance understanding in this critical policy domain and provide insights for future research and policymaking endeavours.

# SESSION 8: GENDER EQUALITY AND LEAVES

## Fathers' intentions and use of paternity leave in the Netherlands

Onur Sahin (Utrecht University, Netherlands)

Mara A. Yerkes (Utrecht University, Netherlands)

Lianne Aarntzen (Utrecht University, Netherlands)

Chantal Remery (Utrecht University, Netherlands)

Belle Derks (Utrecht University, Netherlands)

In this paper, we focus on fathers' leave intentions and take-up of recently-introduced paid partner leave in the Netherlands. The Dutch government responded to the European Work-Life Balance directive by providing fathers (and same-sex partners) one week of fully paid leave from 2019 onwards and an additional five weeks of leave paid at 70 per cent of the daily wage from 2020 onwards. Using couple-based longitudinal data collected among expectant parents pre- and post-birth in 2023, we analyse fathers' intentions to use leave pre-birth in relation to their leave-taking behaviour post-birth. We focus on how gender essentialist beliefs and the support of line managers explain variation in fathers' capabilities to realize their intentions to take-up leave in practice.

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## Paternal Leave-Taking and U.S. Fathers' Participation in Housework

Richard J. Petts (Ball State University, USA)

Daniel L. Carlson (University of Utah, USA)

Chris Knoester (Ohio State University, USA)

Paternal leave is one policy that is believed to promote greater gender equality, and numerous studies have shown that paternal leave promotes greater father involvement in childcare. However, less is known about whether paternal leave-taking may facilitate father involvement in other forms of domestic labor such as housework. Using repeated cross-sectional data on partnered parents from the Study on Parents' Divisions of Labor During COVID (SPDLC), we examine whether paternal leave-taking and length of paternal leave are associated with U.S. fathers' shares of, and time spent in, housework. Findings suggest that paternal leave-taking is positively associated with fathers' shares of, and time spent in, housework tasks. Results also suggest that longer paternal leaves are associated with fathers performing greater shares of housework. Overall, evidence from this study suggests that the benefits of paternal leave may extend to fathers' greater participation in housework, providing additional support for the belief that increased use of paternal leave may help to promote gender equality.

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