RESEARCH

Meret Lütolf

The Balancing Act of Working Mothers and Caring Fathers

Impact of Family Policy on Egalitarianism in Families in Western Democracies

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Impact of Family Policy on Egalitarianism in Families in Western Democracies

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Inaugural dissertation submitted by Meret Anna Maria Lütolf in fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor rerum socialium (Dr. rer. soc.) at the Faculty of Business, Economics and Social Sciences of the University of Bern, Switzerland. The faculty accepted this work as dissertation on 23.05.2024 at the request of the two advisors Prof. Dr. Isabelle Stadelmann-Steffen (University of Bern) and Prof. Dr. Daniel Oesch (University of Lausanne), without wishing to take a position on the view presented therein.

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To my children Mio, Emilia and Lino

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> Call it a clan, call it a network, call it a tribe, call it a family. Whatever you call it, whoever you are, you need one.
>
> — Jane Howard

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Bern Meret Lütolf
27.01.2025

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Part I
Introduction

Family, Work and Policies

1

Families are a fundamental unit of social structure, consisting of "a group of people who are related to each other, such as a mother, a father, and their children" (Cambridge Dictionary, 2024a).[1] Although the Cambridge Dictionary defines father and mother solely in terms of sex, as "a male parent" (Cambridge Dictionary 2024b) and "a female parent" (Cambridge Dictionary 2024c) respectively, these two parental figures carry distinct connotations in Western democracies. Gender-specific roles are deeply ingrained in society. For example, the constitution of Ireland still states today that "mothers shall not be obliged by economic necessity to engage in labour to the neglect of their duties in the home" (Irish Const. art. 41.2.2°).[2]

This book examines these gendered roles attributed to parents and their implications for family policy. Gender equality is a recognised goal in Western democracies. However, gender inequalities increase significantly when starting a family (Gonalons-Pons 2023, p. 1745; Singley and Hynes 2005; Yavorsky et al. 2015) and the gendered allocation of work within families results in a variety of negative effects, like economic and emotional well-being (refer to Subsection 1.1.1). Thus, family policy measures are crucial in promoting gender equality, and it is important to identify effective policies to achieve this goal.

The introduction identifies research gaps, particularly in relation to fathers and their role as caregivers, and shows that parental leave is considered to have the greatest potential to influence paternal care within family policy. Therefore, this book aims to identify ways for family policy, particularly parental leave policies,

[1] This thesis underwent linguistic editing using ChatGPT 3.5, DeepL Translator, DeepL Write Beta, and Textshuttle.

[2] The referendum to amend this article of the constitution was rejected on the International Women's Day, 8 March 2024 (Specia 2024).

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to contribute to advancing an egalitarian distribution of paid and unpaid work. As the focus of this work is on gender-specific differences and gendered patterns between men and women, the elaborations are limited to heterosexual couples and a narrow definition of family, which includes a mother, a father, and at least one child. This approach aligns with states policies' hetero-normative stance.

The established approach of studying families as a unit, i.e., household, will be followed, with a specific focus on fathers. Additionally, this work will examine the influence of family policy regimes on parents allocation of time. The analysis traces the development of the family policy ideal from the traditional male breadwinner and female homemaker family model to one that strengthens not only women's gainful employment but also the caring role of fathers. In brief, I shall analyse *the balancing act of working mothers and caring fathers.*

1.1 Family Policy in the Context of Welfare State Research

Before discussing gender roles within families and the scope of family policy in Western democracies, this thesis begins by addressing the overarching problem. To comprehend gender equality, as a societal objective, I will first identify and elaborate on the issues and negative impacts resulting from gendered family organisation.

This section establishes the main research question. This overarching question is differentiated and divided into three more concrete subordinate research questions in the following Section 1.2.

1.1.1 The Problem of Gendered Family Organisation

Families are a fundamental unit of social structure that have undergone significant organisational changes towards greater gender equality in response to changing economic, social, and cultural landscapes. Despite steps towards gender equality, persistent disparities in family organisation and employment continue to shape individuals' lives in profound ways (see, e.g., Birkett and Forbes 2019; Chung and van der Lippe 2018; Gonalons-Pons 2023; Reimer 2020). Traditionally defined gender roles have undergone reevaluation, challenging conventional norms and fostering more equitable divisions of work within households in Western democracies (see, e.g., Altintas and Sullivan 2016; Domínguez-Folgueras et al. 2017; Scarborough et al. 2019; Sullivan et al. 2018). Concurrently, the world of employment has experienced a paradigm shift, with women increasingly participating in

the workforce, altering predominance of the traditional male breadwinner model (see, e.g., Ciccia and Bleijenbergh 2014; Ciccia and Verloo 2012; Müller et al. 2018).

The implications of gender differences in family organisation and employment extend far beyond the confines of the household and workplace. One of the critical areas influenced by these dynamics is economic well-being. Disparities in earning potential, occupational segregation, and the persistence of the gender wage gap contribute to variations in women's shares of family income (see, e.g., Auspurg et al. 2017a; He et al. 2019; Hook and Paek 2020; Lalive et al. 2023; Moskos 2020; Musick et al. 2020; Weeden et al. 2016). These economic differences, in turn, play a pivotal role in shaping the risk of poverty for different gender groups (Corsi et al. 2016; Fins 2020). Moreover, the intricate relationship between gender, family, and employment has profound implications for mental health. The juggling of multiple roles within the family and workplace may lead to heightened stress levels, particularly for women who bear the brunt of caregiving responsibilities (see, e.g., Dean et al. 2022; Ruppanner et al. 2019).

In the context of gender-specific division of labour, both mothers and fathers are subject to adverse consequences. While mothers struggle with labour market segregation and the pressure of high workload especially through combining care and labour, fathers encounter different challenges stemming from societal expectations. Survey data reveal fathers expressing a request to reduce their employment hours to enhance their involvement in family life (Stadelmann-Steffen et al. 2024). However, employer resistance, coupled with structural obstacles like a prevailing full-time norm in male-dominated workplaces and traditional masculinity ideals focused on the breadwinning role, obstruct the pursuit of reduced labour hours, particularly in the form of part-time employment (see, e.g., Borgkvist 2022; Burnett et al. 2013; Larsson and Björk 2017; Lott and Klenner 2018). The existing structure thus continues to maintain a gender imbalance, making it difficult for fathers to realise their desire for more involvement in family life within the existing work environment.

The culmination of gender-specific distinctions frequently becomes pronounced during family dissolution: The consequences of a divorce for a couple with children often exhibit gender differences that manifest in various aspects of family dynamics. Research suggests that mothers frequently bear a disproportionate burden in terms of custodial responsibilities and emotional support for the children post-divorce (see, e.g., Crosse and Millar 2019; Meyer et al. 2017). Mothers may experience an increased workload and emotional strain, assuming the primary caregiving role, while fathers may contend with challenges in maintaining consistent involvement in their children's lives (see, e.g., Jurma

2015; Sodermans et al. 2015; van der Heijden et al. 2016). Economic disparities may also emerge, with divorced mothers often facing a higher risk of financial instability (see, e.g., Allen et al. 2011; Chanda 2023; Van Winkle and Leopold 2021). Additionally, the emotional well-being of children may be influenced differently based on the gender of the custodial parent, as well as the quality of the co-parenting relationship (see, e.g., Kalmijn 2015; King and Sobolewski 2006). Understanding and addressing these gender-specific consequences is crucial for developing comprehensive support systems and interventions that foster the well-being of all family members in the aftermath of divorce.

These examples illustrate the issues related to gender-specific differences and their potential negative consequences. Within the discourse surrounding gender, and more specifically, gender differences, prevalent societal norms exert considerable influence. It is crucial to emphasise that normative statements are unsuitable for scientific discussions. However, these examples serve to illustrate that the pursuit of greater egalitarianism, although normative in nature, can be classified as a societal and political aim and is to be conceptualised as a factor to tackle poverty, increase economic equality and strengthen mental well-being, all of which, in turn, lead to improved development conditions for children. Understanding the impact of family policy is crucial because whether or not we have egalitarian households impacts individuals, the economy but also the quality of an equal and free society, which is the foundation of liberal democracy par excellence.

As I conclude this short exploration on outcome differences due to gender within families, the upcoming section delves into the realm of family policy and measures designed to shape and influence the division of work within households. By discussing different approaches and measures, I aim to understand how policies not only affect the distribution of tasks within families, but also how they may help to address and potentially reduce gender inequalities. In shifting the focus from the microcosm of individual families to considering broader societal structures, the exploration reveals the interaction of family dynamics and the broader political landscape. It starts with a brief look at historic development.

1.1.2 Evolution of Gender Roles and Welfare Policies in Western Democracies

Over the past decades, extensive research within comparative welfare states has been dedicated to understanding the profound influence of social policies on gender relations and the associated roles of men and women (Lewis 1992;

O'Connor 1993; Orloff 1993; Pateman 2006; Sainsbury 1994a). A significant revelation from this body of work is the historical reliance of modern welfare systems on a male breadwinner model (Lewis 2001; Mahon 2002). This model presupposes a "family wage" (Daly 2010, p. 140) sustained by male employment, with social policy entitlements predominantly directed at securing the income of the male breadwinner. Accordingly, women were traditionally assigned caregiving responsibilities for dependent family members, particularly children and ageing parents, and welfare state support was primarily mediated through husbands or male relatives (Lewis 2001).

While the male breadwinner model had always imperfectly represented the diversity of family structures, it aligned with prevailing gender roles in most industrialised countries, particularly in the immediate postwar decades (Lewis 2001; Mahon 2002). However, given the substantial rise in women's engagement in the workforce, societal changes, such as shifts in women's roles, increased educational attainment, evolving family structures, and advancements in women's rights, have eroded the applicability of the traditional male breadwinner/female homemaker model in recent decades (Lewis 2001; Mahon 2002; Oláh 2011). These profound changes have been paralleled by the emerging of policies designed to ease the reconciliation of family and work responsibilities. Scholars have noted a transition "from a 'maternalist' policy model, under which mothers were expected to stay home full-time with their children and eschew employment" (Orloff 2006, p. 230), to a model promoting "employment for all", encouraging both men and women to participate in the labour force (see, e.g., Crompton 2001; Leitner 2003; Lewis 2001; Mahon 2002). This transition can be summarised as a shift from the traditional male breadwinner family model to the universal breadwinner model – primarily characterised by a focus on increased female employment (refer to Section 3.2 for an elaborate discussion on various family models).

However, Fraser (1994) took it a step further by proposing the universal caregiver model as an ideal, advocating for both parents to engage in both gainful employment and caregiving responsibilities. This model stands out as fundamentally distinct, given that the shift from the traditional male breadwinner to the universal breadwinner model primarily revolved around the increase in female employment. Embracing this egalitarian universal caregiver family model, however, requires a substantial change in paternal behaviour. Compared to the classic male breadwinner, a key difference is a significant increase in women's participation in the labour market, as is the case for the switch to the universal breadwinner, but in addition (and this is not the case for the switch to the universal breadwinner) fathers reduce their working hours in favour of increased involvement in care.

Fraser (1994)'s work, despite its age, continues to resonate with contemporary discussions, making it more pertinent than ever in current research. Recent academic efforts are not limited to revisiting Fraser (1994)'s work, but are also actively exploring ways of realising its ideas in the current sociopolitical landscape (see, e.g., Ciccia 2017; Dobrotić and Blum 2020; Lütolf and Stadelmann-Steffen 2023; Müller et al. 2018; Rubery 2015).

1.1.3 The Scope of Family Policy

In summary, the design of the welfare state significantly influences families and various family models are promoted through policies. Specifically, this refers to family policy measures, which play a crucial role in addressing and reducing the gender gap within households. By implementing supportive policies, societies can empower individuals to balance family responsibilities more equitably.

The term *family policy* is used differently in the literature and can be defined broadly "as including all social and economic policies that affect families as such" (Eydal and Rostgaard 2018, p. 2) and more specifically as "policies that are aimed at families, hence emphasising how the policy defines the nexus between state and family and between family members" (Eydal and Rostgaard 2018, p. 2). In its broad scope, family policy includes various governmental programs, schemes, and caring responsibilities, encompassing financial support through taxes and transfers, as well as laws directed at supporting and benefiting families (Gauthier and Koops 2018). In this book, the definition of family policy is more narrowly focused, specifically encompassing policies aimed at reconciling family and work, also referred to as reconciliation policy. Researchers subscribing to this more limited perspective on family policy frequently emphasise the three following policies: cash benefits, parental leave, and early childhood education and care (ECEC) (see, e.g., Daly and Ferragina 2018; Nieuwenhuis et al. 2019). Conversely, other research studies addressing the work-family balance prioritise parental leave and ECEC, along with labour market conditions, instead of placing the same emphasis on cash benefits (see, e.g., Bünning and Hipp 2022). In this manner, Gornick and Meyers (2003, p. 100) identify three key areas where the state can intervene to define a country's reconciliation strategy: family leave, childcare policies, and the regulation of working time and place.

Transitioning from an exploration of diverse interpretations of family policy, the subsequent discussion delves into the broader research landscape dedicated to understanding the factors that shape the organisation of paid and unpaid work

for individuals or households. The role of work-family reconciliation policies in fostering an equitable distribution of work within households has been thoroughly examined in comparative welfare state research (see, e.g., Blofield and Martínez Franzoni 2015; Gornick and Meyers 2003; Hagemann et al. 2011; Lewis 1992; Mahon 2006; Sainsbury 1994a; Stadelmann-Steffen 2011).

Examining the evolution of research in understanding work-family dynamics over recent decades, there has been a notable paradigm shift from a singular focus on women to a more comprehensive examination of households or couples as a whole. Various studies have identified work-family policies, especially public childcare provision and adequately compensated parental leave, as potential catalysts for enhancing women's participation in the labour market (see, e.g., Asai 2015; Blofield and Martínez Franzoni 2015; Ferragina 2019; Gambaro et al. 2019; Geyer et al. 2015; Gornick and Meyers 2003; Hegewisch and Gornick 2011; Hook and Paek 2020; Mahon 2002; Nollenberger and Rodriguez-Planas 2015; Olivetti and Petrongolo 2017; Sainsbury 1994a; Stadelmann-Steffen 2011; Vuri 2016). Expanding beyond maternal employment, scholars have advocated for a more comprehensive examination of the interplay between various spheres of paid and unpaid work, scrutinising the impact of specific policies and work structures on gendered work patterns (see, e.g., Ciccia 2017; Finch 2021; Lütolf and Stadelmann-Steffen 2023). Furthermore, an increasing number of research is dedicated to analysing the determinants of unpaid work at home, highlighting individual and household processes and considering the significance of national context, including norms and policies (see, e.g., Dotti Sani 2014; Schober and Zoch 2019; Tamilina and Tamilina 2014). While an area that is still developing, certain studies have shed light on the role of fathers and how work-family policies influence men's engagement in unpaid work (see, e.g., Altintas and Sullivan 2017; Bünning 2015; Bünning and Pollmann-Schult 2016; Hook 2006; Nepomnyaschy and Waldfogel 2007). Moreover, research is increasingly shifting its focus from individual mothers or fathers to viewing families or households as a whole (see, e.g., Auspurg et al. 2017b; Gonalons-Pons 2023; Killewald and García-Manglano 2016; Lütolf and Stadelmann-Steffen 2023; Schober 2013; Stertz et al. 2017). Instead of examining parents in isolation, there is a growing emphasis on understanding the dynamics and interactions of couples as parents. This more comprehensive approach recognises the significance of collectively studying family units, acknowledging the shared responsibilities that couples have in dividing tasks within their parenting roles.

Hence, the primary focus of this book will centre on families as a whole, underscoring the significance of the central concept of family models (see Section 3.2). Nevertheless, to comprehensively grasp and promote family models, it is essential to thoroughly understand their various components. Therefore,

individual relationships are highlighted and analysed in detail (refers to Part IV) to achieve a holistic understanding in the end.

1.1.4 The Role of Parental Leave in Advancing Egalitarian Family Dynamics

As explored in Subsection 1.1.2, contemporary research places a strong emphasis on the pursuit of a universal caregiver family model. Fraser (1994) acknowledged the challenges, deeming the concept a utopian fantasy. Even after three decades, this model is far from becoming mainstream, necessitating the identification of active measures to support its realisation. In the words of Rubery (2015, p. 535): "We cannot expect to arrive at a gender-equal world without either knowing what that world might look like or identifying policy agendas for welfare and employment reform that might move us in that direction." While the universal caregiver model seeks to eliminate gender-specific distinctions, the current path remains gendered due to prevailing welfare state systems grounded in the traditional male breadwinner model. Establishing egalitarian family forms demands distinct developments for each gender, necessitating a gender-specific approach. If we envision a future gender-independent state, policies supporting a universal caregiver model may cease to differentiate by gender. However, in the present, realising the universal caregiver model requires two primary changes: Promoting men's involvement in caregiving and facilitating the integration of women into paid employment alongside their ongoing caregiving (Orloff 2002, p. 41).

Despite family models being inherently about households, research has predominantly focused on women and policies influencing their behaviour (see, e.g., Boeckmann et al. 2015; Cascio et al. 2015; Ferragina 2019; Korpi et al. 2013; Orloff 2002; Schönberg and Ludsteck 2014). To advance, the focus must shift to fathers, unravelling how to promote the transition from the universal breadwinner to the universal caregiver paradigm. Yet, the understanding of policies shaping fathers' behaviour and actively supporting transformative changes, such as reducing gainful employment in favour of care work, remains limited. Parental leave policies emerge as a pivotal factor, with studies indicating their unique design as the sole recognised approach capable of influencing paternal care time: Initial findings on paternal outcomes suggest that paternal leave leads to long-term positive effects, including increased emotional investment and improved relationships with infants, greater paternal engagement in childcare and household responsibilities, more equitable sharing of housework between parents, and a reduction in fathers' working hours (Almqvist and Duvander 2014; Arnalds et al. 2022;

Bünning 2015; Castro-García and Pazos-Moran 2016; Dearing 2016; Doucet and McKay 2020; Huerta et al. 2014; Meil 2013; O'Brien 2009; Patnaik 2019; Ray et al. 2010; Rubery 2015; Schober and Zoch 2019; Tamm 2019). Moreover, research continues to reveal additional effects. For instance, a recent study demonstrated a reduction in sexist attitudes among fathers who took parental leave (Tavits et al. 2024).

To advance egalitarianism in family organisation, the focus of this study is specifically centred on parental leave, recognising its potential for inducing fundamental changes in behaviour. The existing one-sided emphasis on women and mothers in research has left a gap in understanding the differentiated impacts of parental and paternity leave on fathers' behaviour. Hence, this study primarily investigates the role of the fathers to address this gap.

1.1.5 Family Policy Regimes in Western Democracies

In order not to underestimate the complexity of the mechanisms involved, it is pivotal to examine the broader context and, therefore, to take the family policy regime into account, regardless of whether the research focus is on one specific policy. After all, these policies do not emerge randomly, nor do their effects take place in isolation (Daly and Ferragina 2018). In other words, diverse policy measures not only differ in their objectives and capacities to redefine work and family relations based on their design, but their effects also depend on the larger policy context and the policy-mix within which they operate (see, e.g., Ciccia and Bleijenbergh 2014; Leitner 2003; Michel and Mahon 2002; Pfau-Effinger 2005; Sullivan and Gershuny 2001; Vuri 2016). Overall, the combinations of paid and unpaid work, of men and women, and the broader welfare and national contexts need to be considered (see, e.g., Hook and Paek 2020; Lütolf and Stadelmann-Steffen 2023). Recognising that policies' impact depend on their interaction and the broader context of the welfare and labour market in which they are embedded, considering differing national contexts when employing a comparative perspective for systematic policy analysis is crucial (Thébaud 2010, p. 331). Customised to specific strategies for reconciling work and family, reconciliation policies engage with other policies, guided by assumptions about the role of the state and family. Scholars have extensively explored the normative ideals underpinning various reconciliation strategies, analysing resulting policy configurations and combinations (see, e.g., Boje and Ejrnœs 2011; Crompton 2001; Gornick and Meyers 2003; Leitner 2003; Lewis 1992, 2001; Neilson and Stanfors 2014; Orloff 1993; Sainsbury 1996).

These normative ideals and ideas about the role of the state, the market and the family are not only specifically reflected in family policy, but more generally in the organisation and characteristics of the welfare state. The recognition and categorisation of these variations serve a crucial purpose in research, facilitating a deeper understanding of the diverse models and their respective effects. The classic typology undertakes a broad categorisation into liberal, social democratic, and conservative regimes (Emmenegger et al. 2015). Applied to family policy, the three types can be summarised as follows:

Liberal regimes prioritise individual responsibility, often offering means-tested economic support to families in need. In contrast, social democratic regimes emphasise equality, providing universal access to comprehensive family services such as affordable childcare and parental leave. Conservative regimes, rooted in traditional family values, may offer incentives for traditional gender roles and tax benefits for married couples.

While this typology serves its purpose, it was originally designed for the general categorisation of welfare states and exhibits certain weaknesses – most notably, the oversight of the gender dimension, which is particularly significant in the context of families and their organisation of work (Arts and Gelissen 2002; Bambra 2007a; Lewis 1992; O'Connor 1993, 1996; Orloff 2009; Sainsbury 1994a). Especially two points can be found repeatedly in feminist criticism: neglect of family as a welfare and care provider, and the impact of gendered labour market attachment on welfare state outcomes (Gauthier and Koops 2018, p. 13). Thus, Lewis (1992) underscores the significance of the nexus between welfare and both paid and unpaid work, emphasising the incorporation of a dimension focused on family and domestic circumstances. The effectiveness and design of family policies are deeply influenced by the broader welfare state context. The level of state intervention, the distribution of resources, and societal norms all play pivotal roles in shaping family policy. As a consequence, there have been various attempts to incorporate gender and family considerations into welfare state typologies, recognising the wide-ranging variations in family policy regimes – specifically, the set of principles and interventions governing the support provided to families – across different welfare states (see, e.g., Daly 1994; Lewis 1997; Orloff 1993; Saxonberg 2013; Siaroff 1994). The differences in these regimes underscore the intricate relationship between societal values, economic structures, and the role of the state in shaping family life.

In summary, different family policy regimes vary in their consequences at the individual and familial levels. They influence choices regarding work, caregiving responsibilities, and the overall balance between family and employment (see, e.g., Collins 2020; Lewis 1997). Additionally, family policy regimes contribute

to shaping gender roles within societies, impacting the degree of gender equality in family and work dynamics (see, e.g., Lewis and Giullari 2005; Misra et al. 2007; Neilson and Stanfors 2014; Sainsbury 1996).

1.1.6 The Overarching Research Question

Taking into account these contextual variations and given the adverse effects of gender disparities in family organisation discussed earlier (see Subsection 1.1.1), it raises the question of how the family policy regime influences gender differences within families. Lütolf and Stadelmann-Steffen (2023) combined the household perspective with a comparative approach and empirically tested the effects of family policy measures on lived family models. The aim of their paper is to assess the relationship between patterns of family policies and the within-household division of labour (i.e., the allocation of both partners to paid work, care work, and housework) by combining existing observational data, namely the ISSP 2012 and contextual family policy data (Ciccia 2017). However, due to data limitations, they could only do this approximately, leaving the question of causality and its direction largely unanswered. Similarly, their conclusions on parental leave remain rather sparse, as the low variance in parental leave policies across the analysed countries makes it challenging to demonstrate significant effects. Furthermore, given the absence of a country implementing a genuinely "equality-promoting" policy design, they conclude "that based on the observed policies in the European countries, we cannot really assess the full potential of how leave schemes and related policy configurations affect the within-household division of labour" (Lütolf and Stadelmann-Steffen 2023, p. 19). Hence, lingering questions persist concerning parental leave, specifically regarding the design that could more actively engage fathers in unpaid work, as well as concerning the magnitude of potential policy effects. In essence, to address this research gap, this book centres on the overarching research question:

> How do parental leave policies that are embedded in country-specific family policy regimes promote an egalitarian division of paid work and care work within families?

This inquiry delves into the specific mechanisms and interventions within family policies that facilitate or hinder egalitarian dynamics in terms of work division within familial structures. In this context, this thesis builds upon the research conducted by Gornick and Meyers (2008), which extensively explored potential reforms to foster gender-egalitarian societies. Specifically, they advocate for

Fraser (1994)'s vision, referred to as an "earner–carer society – a social arrangement in which women and men engage symmetrically in paid work and unpaid caregiving, and where young children have ample time with their parents" (Gornick and Meyers 2008, p. 313). Additionally, the thesis seeks to comprehend the overarching impact of the broader family policy regime on shaping the overall landscape of gender roles, caregiving responsibilities, and the pursuit of egalitarian ideals within family units. Nevertheless, this inquiry remains quite broad and requires further clarification and specificity.

1.2 Connecting Egalitarian Family Models with Parental Leave Policies

As the question of how parental leave policies can promote egalitarianism within families is quite broad, it requires further specification and clarification. To achieve this objective, the question is divided into three sub-questions, which are formulated in this section. Moreover, it is important to consider the impact of a specific parental leave policy within the larger family policy regime. This study repeatedly refers to these regimes and, thus, points to the specification in the overarching research question including the embedding of leave policies in country-specific family policy regimes. The diagram in Figure 1.1 presents an overview on the structure and levels of the different research questions.

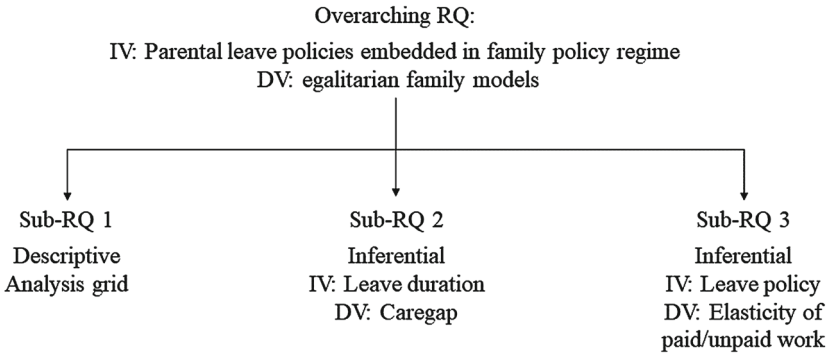

Figure 1.1 Structure of the research questions. (Note: RQ stands for research question, IV for independent variable and DV for dependent variable. Source: Prepared by the author.)

1.2.1 The Egalitarianism of Parental Leave Policies

The focus on parental leave within family policy, due to its significant impact on fathers' behaviour, has already been introduced in Subsection 1.1.4. Moreover, parental leave is the ideal policy to examine the impact of family policy, as the beginning of parenthood represents a pivotal moment in a couple's life course that has a significant impact on gender dynamics. Firstly, research consistently underscores a pronounced escalation in gender differences following the birth of the first child (Singley and Hynes 2005; Yavorsky et al. 2015). Traditional gender roles tend to become more accentuated, with mothers often assuming a primary caregiving role while fathers may experience heightened expectations related to breadwinning responsibilities. This shift is influenced by societal norms and expectations surrounding parenting roles, leading to a widening gap in domestic and caregiving responsibilities between partners (Baxter et al. 2015; Killewald and García-Manglano 2016). Secondly, the transition to parenthood stands out as a decisive moment, shaping the future organisational dynamics of the couple, since "behavior learned at the beginning of the parenthood experience tends to stick in later years" (Patnaik 2019, p. 1013). The decisions and adjustments made during this critical period play a decisive role in determining the distribution of responsibilities within the household. Choices regarding the division of childcare, domestic tasks, and career priorities are navigated, setting the tone for the evolving partnership (O'Brien and Wall 2017; Patnaik 2019; Rehel 2014; Schober and Zoch 2019).

So overall, the birth of a child and the first period after it is discussed in the literature as a critical time when a couple must find themselves in new roles and the new tasks and responsibilities that arise are redistributed (Huerta et al. 2014; Schober and Zoch 2019; Tanaka and Waldfogel 2007). Since parental leave falls precisely in this period, it can be reasonably assumed that such policies have great potential to influence parental behaviour. In summary, it appears evident that taking parental leave has the potential to encourage increased paternal involvement in caregiving even beyond the leave period. To maximise this effect, it is crucial to explore policy designs that enhance fathers' leave take-up, considering that research indicates a significant number of fathers either do not use these policies or only use them partially (Jurado-Guerrero and Muñoz-Comet 2021; Reimer 2020; Rostgaard and Ejrnæs 2021; Saarikallio-Torp and Miettinen, 2021). The detailed discussion of specific designs and individual aspects of parental leave policies is essential in understanding and addressing this issue (Castellanos-Serrano et al. 2024; Haas and Rostgaard 2011, p. 181). The ultimate

goal is to pinpoint the design of a parental leave policy that fosters genuine egalitarianism, encompassing both theoretical design and practical implementation. The sub-research question guiding this exploration is:

> How should a parental leave policy be designed to achieve maximal egalitarianism?

This central inquiry delves into the essential attributes required for maximising fathers' inclusion and evaluates the current state of egalitarianism of existing parental leave policies. Furthermore, it seeks to understand the extent to which current policies incentivise fathers to actively participate in caregiving.

1.2.2 Correlations between Leave Duration and Gender Equality in Care

While there are already some research results, certain aspects of paternal behaviour after parental leave has ended remain unclear. For instance, conflicting views exist on the lasting impact on fathers' working hours, with some studies confirming it and others, like Patnaik (2019), asserting that paternity leave diminishes gender specialisation in the long term. Parental leave policies have raised considerable attention in research, particularly in the context of fathers' engagement in child-rearing responsibilities (see, e.g., Dearing 2016; Dobrotić and Blum 2020; Doucet and McKay 2020; Meil 2013; Rehel 2014). One significantly underdeveloped aspect of research is correlations of paternal behaviour and the duration of leave, particularly because fathers often do not exhaust their leave options, resulting in limited data variation. Several studies have identified a positive relationship between fathers' uptake of parental leave and their longer-term childcare hours (Almqvist and Duvander 2014; Bünning 2015; Meil 2013; Patnaik 2019; Tamm 2019). Moreover, indications suggest stronger effects on fathers' childcare involvement with longer paternal leave duration (Fernández-Cornejo et al. 2016; Haas and Hwang 2008; Huerta et al. 2014; Nepomnyaschy and Waldfogel 2007). While Fernández-Cornejo et al. (2016)'s analysis yields clear results indicating increased paternal care involvement with longer leaves, it is constrained by its focus on Spain, specifically the policy reform of 2007, which limits the leave duration. Consequently, it raises the question of the potential effects of more extended paternity leaves. Furthermore, it remains largely unclear to what extent the duration of paternal leave uptake and the subsequent division of care between parents in the long run are associated with each other.

This constitutes another focal point of this inquiry, seeking to address a gap by closely scrutinising both the duration of parental leave and the distribution of caregiving responsibilities between spouses. Investigating whether a correlation exists between these two variables, spanning not just the immediate post-leave period but also the long term, holds the potential to yield valuable insights into the dynamics of family caregiving responsibilities and the influence of parental leave policies on advancing gender equality. Therefore, the following second sub-research question is posed:

> Does a correlation exist between the length of parental leave taken by fathers upon the birth of their first child and the egalitarianism of the long-term distribution of caregiving responsibilities among parents?

1.2.3 Correlations between Leave Policies and Paternal Time Allocation

The aforementioned inquiry raises a critical concern regarding the direction of causality. Theoretically, one may assume that interactions exist, and causality is not unidirectional. This aspect introduces a nuanced layer of complexity to the analysis, suggesting that the relationship between macro-level family policy measures and micro-level lived family models may involve reciprocal influences. Endogeneity emerges as a persistent challenge in the examination of family policy measures (see, e.g., Lütolf and Stadelmann-Steffen 2023). Singular studies often rely on natural experimental designs, exemplified by Mayer and Le Bourdais (2019), Patnaik (2019), and Wray (2020)'s investigation on the case of a subnational parental leave reform in Quebec in Canada. These designs allow for comparisons both before and after the implementation of policy measures within a specific geographic region. However, these studies remain case-specific, and while they provide valuable insights, the broader applicability of their findings to diverse regimes may be limited.

A critical limitation further emerges concerning the practical implementation of leave policies, as illuminated by Lütolf and Stadelmann-Steffen (2023)'s examination of macro data sourced from Ciccia (2017). Although there are some differences between countries, Lütolf and Stadelmann-Steffen (2023)'s evaluation indicates a remarkable overall homogeneity among existing leave policies, revealing a lack of truly egalitarian designs across countries. The findings indicate that, due to limited representation of countries scoring high on the parental

leave dimension in Ciccia (2017)'s fuzzy set analysis and even the most egalitarian nations falling significantly short of the ideal, a genuinely egalitarian version of parental leave policies had not been fully realised at the time of data collection (Lütolf and Stadelmann-Steffen 2023, p. 15). This is evident for their results on parental leave, which do not show any major effects. In-depth analyses reveal that the impacts attributed to policy packages are caused by childcare policies rather than parental leave policies (Lütolf and Stadelmann-Steffen 2023, pp. 18–19).

This limitation points to a more fundamental issue: The inadequacy of current policy landscapes to fully unveil the potential of parental leave. A comprehensive understanding of the impact of such policies necessitates the analysis of highly developed, egalitarian policy-mixes, a level of policy evolution not yet realised in any country today. The current state of leave policies, with their limited diversity and lack of truly egalitarian models, imposes a barrier to elucidating the nuanced dynamics that might unfold with more advanced and progressive policy frameworks. This limitation underscores the necessity for a broader spectrum of policy variations to truly unlock the latent potential and ramifications of parental leave policies.

This problem is exacerbated, especially when analysing fathers, as the policy differences tend to be small for them, and what is crucial for the policies to be genuinely egalitarian is precisely the full involvement of fathers. This raises pertinent questions about the divisions of labour within families under ideal parental leave policies and highlight the need for more detailed measures to conduct comprehensive empirical investigations into the effectiveness and alignment of parental leave policies with the theoretical ideals, particularly with a focus on encouraging active paternal involvement in caregiving. The third sub-research question, therefore, is:

> Do specific parental leave policy designs have the potential to induce changes in paternal behaviour, particularly in altering the distribution of paid and unpaid work time, and what characteristics define these designs?

To tackle this question experimental data is necessary. The integration of such data not only addresses the limitations posed by the rather homogeneous design of existing leave policies but also opens avenues for exploring truly egalitarian policy designs. In contrast to observational studies that often struggle with endogeneity issues, experimental data provide a unique advantage. By increasing variability and allowing for complexity, experiments enable the inclusion of genuinely egalitarian leave policy designs in the analysis and also facilitate the

determination of causality between these policies and family models. The ability to establish causality is a crucial advancement, as it helps disentangle the complex web of relationships between family policy measures and lived family models. By leveraging experimental methodologies, this study can move beyond the constraints posed by endogeneity, offering a more robust understanding of how specific policy interventions influence the dynamics of households.

Foreshadowing the Content of this Book

2

In this chapter, I will present the comprehensive research plan of this book, delving into various aspects that contribute to a nuanced understanding of the allocation of paid and unpaid work within families. This includes outlining the overarching contributions and presenting an overview of the structure of this book.

2.1 Research Plan

In line with recent research trends, I examine families as cohesive units with a specific focus on the gender gap. Rather than only isolating individual mothers or fathers, the investigation acknowledges the importance of studying the parents interactions within the familial context. This perspective recognises that family dynamics are shaped not only by the roles of individual parents but also by the intricate interplay between mothers and fathers. By concentrating on the gender gap and considering families as a whole, this research aims to provide a nuanced understanding of the factors influencing gender roles and relationships within households.

To tackle the first sub-research question centred on the specific design of parental leave policies,[1] an analysis grid is developed to gauge the egalitarianism of these policies. Previous scholars have sought to measure the egalitarian nature of various parental leave policies (Castro-García and Pazos-Moran 2016; Dearing 2016; Koslowski 2021; Ray et al. 2010). However, these studies often rely on outdated

[1] How should a parental leave policy be designed to achieve maximal egalitarianism?

M. Lütolf, *The Balancing Act of Working Mothers and Caring Fathers*,
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data, failing to capture the latest developments in the field. Notably, many policies under examination were first adopted in the 2000s, yet some reforms directly impacting fathers have only taken place more recently. Given the multidimensionality and complexity of parental leave policies, a qualitative, case-specific assessment becomes essential to clarify the diverse incentive structures they create.

In response, an analysis grid is introduced, focusing on assessing parental leave policies based on their impact on fathers, mothers, and their role in promoting the universal caregiver model. Two indices, the *policy ideal index* and the *policy implementation index*, are devised. The former measures the legal design of policies, while the latter indicates how families are likely to implement these policies. The crucial distinction between the two indices is pivotal, as any disparities between policy design and implementation reveal potential gaps in the intention of existing policies. This analysis grid serves to establish a connection to current family policies and to evaluate Ciccia and Verloo (2012, p. 520)'s claim that the universal caregiver model remains an ideal concept of equality policy due to its limited implementation in practice.

The subsequent step involves applying this theoretically developed analytical grid to different family policy settings. To account for variations in family policy regimes, the analysis spans five distinct countries: Switzerland, Germany, Finland, Sweden, and the United States. This diverse selection covers a range of Western family policy regimes, facilitating a comprehensive examination of parental leave policies in varying socio-political contexts.

To address the remaining two sub-research questions, a comprehensive analysis is undertaken leveraging insights from a novel dataset (Stadelmann-Steffen et al. 2022). This survey specifically focuses on individuals living with a partner and children under 15 years, targeting those most profoundly influenced by reconciliation policies. With a wide-ranging exploration of paid and unpaid labour dynamics within households, the survey encompasses modules that delve into household composition, organisation of family life, working conditions, attitudes on equality and gender roles, leave take-up, and socio-demographic data.

A distinctive feature of this survey lies in its innovative methodology for measuring time allocation within families. Traditional surveys often encounter challenges in accurately capturing the intricate dynamics of caregiving responsibilities due to the complexity and overlap of tasks. In response, this survey pioneers a novel approach using sliders in a 24-hour bar representation. Participants are tasked with allocating their and their partner's time across four

distinct "spheres of life": gainful employment, care and housework, other activities (such as personal care activities and leisure), and sleep. By grouping care and housework together and including sleep, along with a broader category for "other activities", this method seeks to provide a more realistic and nuanced depiction of participants' time allocation between paid and unpaid work.

To deepen the exploration of the correlation between the duration of paternal leave uptake and care allocation within households, i.e., to tackle the second sub-research question,[2] regression models will be employed. Additionally, to further illuminate the distribution of unpaid work among parents, the concept of the *caregap* is introduced – a measurement summarising the difference between the hours spent on unpaid work by mothers and fathers. These innovative analytical approaches set the stage for a comprehensive understanding of the intricate dynamics within families and the impact of parental leave policies on caregiving responsibilities.

To address the third sub-research question,[3] I conduct conjoint analyses leveraging another key element of the survey: its experimental component, which entails data on behavioural intentions under various potential policy designs. Participants are presented with different scenarios, each containing distinct conditions regarding supplementary childcare, the form of parental leave, and labour market conditions. In response to these conditions, respondents articulate their behavioural intentions concerning their workload, time spent on childcare, and the workload and care time of their partner. This data is instrumental in measuring the influence of various policy fields on the division of labour within families. With the specified focus on leave policies mentioned earlier, the evaluation of the conjoint analyses is also accordingly centred, and the other elements of the conjoint will not be further discussed.

[2] Does a correlation exist between the length of parental leave taken by fathers upon the birth of their first child and the egalitarianism of the long-term distribution of caregiving responsibilities among parents?

[3] Do specific parental leave policy designs have the potential to induce changes in paternal behaviour, particularly in altering the distribution of paid and unpaid work time, and what characteristics define these designs?

2.2 Contributions

The overall contribution of this research is to analyse and gather information about whether and how the still "utopian" universal caregiver model proposed by Fraser (1994) may become a real-world scenario. The thesis aims to address the identified research gaps in the literature on reconciliation policy, work patterns, and gender equality. It contributes by focusing on parental leave policy and the allocation of caregiving responsibilities within families. Specifically, the analysis aims to offer fresh insights into how diverse individuals and households respond to various parental leave policy configurations. The theoretical analysis grid of leave policies and regression models, incorporating the duration of leave uptake, yield conclusions regarding the effectiveness of reconciliation policies. This includes assessing whether they achieve their intended goals or, conversely, if they lead to unintended or adverse effects in specific circumstances or for particular groups. Lastly, employing conjoint analysis will extend the scope to include parental leave policies beyond current implementations. This approach aims to determine the potential of ideal policies and comprehensively present the effects of parental leave on paternal behaviour. The present work bridges existing research gaps in reconciliation policy, work patterns, and gender equality, with a specific focus on parental leave policy and the allocation of work within households. The contributions of this book can be delineated into five key aspects:

1. Theoretical and conceptual contribution
To capture fathers' care work in the household context, the analysis of the relationship between leave duration and paternal caregiving behaviour goes beyond simply looking at the number of hours of care provided by the father. Previous research on leave duration has predominantly focused on fathers' involvement in childcare (Haas and Hwang 2008; Huerta et al. 2014; Nepomnyaschy and Waldfogel 2007). In contrast, this analysis takes a more comprehensive approach by examining fathers within the context of a household, specifically as members of a parenting couple. To assess this, a new dependent variable is introduced – the caregap, defined as the disparity in unpaid labour time between parents. The focus is on the distribution of care between the parents, examining who assumes more caregiving responsibilities and whether unpaid work is distributed in an egalitarian manner. Consequently, the analysis not only considers fathers' involvement but also simultaneously applies the concept of gender equality (Bianchi et al. 2012).

2. Analytical contribution

From an analytical standpoint, this research makes a significant contribution in the realm of measuring the egalitarianism of parental leave policies. Existing approaches, such as Ray et al. (2010)'s index, undervalue wage replacement, while Castro-García and Pazos-Moran (2016)'s quotient oversimplifies the complex policy field with only two values. Koslowski (2021)'s focus on well-paid policies has limitations, including a low 66-percent wage replacement threshold and exclusion of recent policy developments in Finland and Switzerland. In response to these limitations, I propose an innovative analysis grid drawing from recent literature discussions. This grid not only introduces a comprehensive measurement to assess parental leave schemes' egalitarianism and their inclusion of fathers but also introduces two new indices: the *policy ideal index* and the *policy implementation index*. The strength of this thesis lies in providing a robust analytical framework to assess parental leave policies, examining their impact on incentivising fathers, influencing mothers, and ultimately promoting the universal caregiver model.

A more comprehensive picture can be developed of how parents ought to organise themselves under today's parental leave policies, how they effectively organise themselves, and what would be theoretically possible by integrating different methods – a theoretically supported analysis grid and empirical analyses through a combination of the current state with conventional regressions, and policy potentials derived from experiments using conjoint analysis. By scrutinising these aspects, I seek a deeper comprehension of how policy intentions align with the everyday experiences of families. This multifaceted analysis aims to contribute valuable insights into the effectiveness and impact of parental leave policies in the studied countries.

3. Data and survey contributions

The introduction of a novel dataset, derived from an extensive survey across five countries (Switzerland, Germany, Finland, Sweden, and the United States), marks a crucial contribution to the literature. This dataset, focusing on individuals living with a partner and children under 15 years, targets only those most profoundly affected by reconciliation policies. Its significance lies in bridging a substantial gap in existing data. Until now, no available data has presented such intricate insights into the reconciliation of work and family for parents. Beyond filling this void, the dataset offers a wealth of pertinent information. The survey, serving as a foundational element, provides nuanced insights crucial for a profound understanding of these interactions. The meticulous collection of this comprehensive dataset forms the bedrock for in-depth analyses, offering valuable insights into the dynamics of work distribution within households and the delicate balance between work and family responsibilities.

Notably, a new form of time measurement based on 24-hour sliders and the associated information on intra-family work and time allocation is particularly beneficial and enriching for future research ideas on the organisation of couples and households. The collected data, combining the sliders entailing the respondents and their partners time allocation, offers a rich and detailed exploration of the current time distribution within these households. This innovative measurement method not only enhances the accuracy of reported time division but also addresses the limitations observed in existing surveys, setting the stage for a more nuanced analysis of the distribution of work within families and the impact of parental leave policies on gender equality.

In addition, it offers in-depth insights into the uptake of parental leave, elevating the examination of fathers' effective take-up to a more comprehensive level. The detailed analysis encompasses various leave duration, surpassing the scope of previous studies and providing a richer understanding of the dynamics surrounding paternal leave uptake. By differentiating between various leave durations and different type of leave (policy, holidays or unpaid extended leave) the analysis moreover addresses the claim that "research should also more clearly distinguish between levels and categories of paternity leave use (e.g., shorter vs. longer, statutory vs. extended [...])" (Pizarro and Gartzia 2024, p. 11). Furthermore, with a detailed analysis of the correlation between fathers' leave duration and their subsequent caregiving responsibilities, this study investigates the long-term impact on the division of unpaid labour among parents. It extends beyond the scope of short-term behaviours observed immediately after the leave period.

4. Conjoint Analysis contribution

The inclusion of modules for conjoint analysis in the survey makes significant contributions to research in several ways. Firstly, it allows for the analysis of policies that do not currently exist or are not implemented in a certain country. Moreover, it facilitates the inclusion of a wide range of policy combinations, including designs that are not currently found in any country.

Additionally, the application of this method provides a valuable methodological contribution. While conjoint analysis has gained attention among political scientists, its applications have primarily focused on choices related to policies, parties, or individuals (see, e.g., Hainmueller et al. 2015; Horiuchi et al. 2018; Stadelmann-Steffen and Dermont 2018). Applying this approach to measure policy effects on behaviour remains rare but holds promise. Measuring behaviour in survey settings is challenging, and using real-world behavioural data is often impractical. Although conjoint analysis may not be a perfect solution, it brings researchers closer to real-world decision situations, reducing social desirability problems (Auspurg et al. 2015;

Hainmueller et al. 2014). Therefore, in the absence of "real" behavioural data, conjoint analysis offers a valuable approximation to real-world behaviour (Hainmueller et al. 2015).

Finally, conjoint analyses have a major advantage as they allow for the investigation of causal relationships, unlike regressions which are limited to statements on correlations. Thus, this analytical approach enables addressing the problem of endogeneity and through the various attributes, policies can be analysed in the context of each other as policy packages.

5. Comparative approach contribution

This study adopts a comparative approach, running through all the chapters, reinforcing the above contributions. Although a comparative approach may not be considered a contribution on its own, it can become one if accompanied by an in-depth analysis. This is because analyses using a comparative approach often come at the expense of in-depth analysis and specifications. This approach aims to discern whether the gender-specific division of labour is inherently path-dependent, deeply ingrained in a country's norms and values (Pfau-Effinger 2004), or if there is room for flexibility, suggesting policies' potential to induce change. This inquiry primarily revolves around whether countries with conservative gender norms and work patterns might transition toward more egalitarian models. Conversely, it considers if households in countries with more extensive family policies could become more "conservative" in less supportive policy contexts. The selection of five diverse countries ensures a comprehensive coverage of family policy regimes, ranging from the traditionally liberal approach in the United States (Bariola and Collins 2021) to the liberal-conservative family policies of Switzerland (Häusermann and Bürgisser 2022), the historically conservative yet recently reformed family policies in Germany (Schober and Zoch 2019), and the social democratic Scandinavian countries with generous family policies. Notably, Finland emphasises family care (Datta Gupta et al. 2008), while Sweden prioritises universal employment (Hiilamo and Kangas 2009). This diverse policy landscape allows for a nuanced analysis of their impact on the correlation between paternal leave and the allocation of care within households. It sheds light on whether this correlation is predominantly driven by individual attitudes or the available opportunities within a given country.

In sum, this research aims to shed light on the interplay between family dynamics and policy interventions, promoting a more equitable distribution of care between parents. It examines patterns of caregiving responsibilities within families and assesses the extent to which fathers utilise parental leave. This book offers a multifaceted examination of parental leave policies, encompassing theoretical advancements,

methodological innovations, and empirical insights. Through this comprehensive approach, it significantly advances our understanding of the intricate dynamics between family policies, caregiving responsibilities, and gender equality. In this sense, it responds to the research gap identified by Pizarro and Gartzia (2024) in their systematic review of paternity leave studies, which revealed significant fragmentation characterised by diverse methodological approaches, samples and topics within the field, this thesis seeks to integrate various aspects of paternity leave research by adopting an integrative approach. By combining various methodological approaches and exploring different facets of paternity leave, and incorporating samples from five different countries representing distinct family policy regimes, I aim to establish a cohesive "common theoretical and empirical grounding" (Pizarro and Gartzia 2024, p. 10).

2.3 Overview

This book is structured into five parts. The first part, the introduction, concludes with this overview of the dissertation.

The second part focuses on conceptualisations and theories and consists of three chapters. It begins with Chapter 3, which discusses family models in the social sciences. The chapter first conceptualises paid and unpaid work, discusses their interactions and dependencies, and then elaborates on the central family models. Chapter 4 discusses family policy and the effects of reconciliation policies, with a focus on gender-specific impacts. This is particularly important given the previously established gender-specific division of labour within family models. The chapter concludes by emphasising the important role of fathers and policies, particularly parental leave policies, in promoting paternal caregiving and moving away from the traditional breadwinner role. Chapter 5 is dedicated to parental leave and to establishing an ideal policy design to support and promote fathers in their role as caregivers. A specific focus is placed on the duration of paternity leave and correlations with the within household division of care in different family policy regimes. Corresponding hypotheses are formulated. To conclude, this chapter addresses and elaborates on the three sub-research questions from Section 1.2, each in its respective part of Chapter 5.

The third part of this book focuses on the research design and is divided into three chapters. Chapter 6 discusses case selection, advocating for a selection that covers a broad range of family policy regimes within Western welfare states and describes the family policy regimes in the five selected countries: Switzerland,

Germany, Finland, Sweden, and the United States. In Chapter 7 an analysis grid for measuring the egalitarianism of parental leave policies is developed and the two indices, the *policy ideal index* and the *policy implementation index* are introduced. Chapter 8 focuses on data, beginning with a description of the data gap in existing data and then providing a detailed account of the survey. The chapter places special emphasis on the innovative measurement of parental time allocation and the conjoint experiment. Section 8.3 discusses additional operationalisations, in addition to those already covered in connection with the conjoint analysis.

The empirical analysis is presented in the fourth part, starting with Chapter 9. In this chapter, the analysis grid is applied to the five countries to answer the first sub-research question stated in Subsection 1.2.1. Chapter 10 examines the significance of paternity leave duration and includes regression analyses to investigate its relationship with the caregap, addressing the second research question in Subsection 1.2.2. Chapter 11 presents the conjoint analyses and provides answers to the sub-research question from Subsection 1.2.3.

The fifth and final part of this book offers a conclusion, which comprises the last two chapters. Chapter 12 summarises the most important points from the empirical findings, seeking to answer the hypotheses and research questions. The subsequent Chapter 13 discusses the most important contributions and limitations of this study and proposes ideas for future research. The thesis ends with concluding thoughts.

Part II
Theory

Family Models in Social Science Research

3

The Theory Part is divided into three chapters. The first chapter presents different family models, the second discusses family policies and their impact on family models, and the third explains the central role of parental leave, particularly paternal leave, and derives the hypotheses.

This first conceptional chapter illuminates the complex relationship between paid and unpaid work within families, a dynamic reflected in diverse family models. The specific allocation of tasks is examined, taking into account factors such as job value, gender equality ideals, and the interplay between gainful employment and caregiving responsibilities. The thesis centres around the concept of family models, with particular focus on the universal caregiver family model, which is described as the egalitarian ideal and serves as the goal of family policy in both the theoretical discussion and empirical analysis. Before exploring family models, I first examine the different types of work and their interactions, setting the stage for a comprehensive understanding of the complexities shaping familial structures.

3.1 The Interdependence of Paid and Unpaid Work

While the concept of *paid work* is generally clear, the term *unpaid work* carries varied interpretations depending on the context and requires clarification (Madörin 2010). To be precise, unpaid work encompasses household tasks such as laundry, shopping, cooking, cleaning, gardening, and minor repairs to everyday objects, as well as the unpaid care and nursing of family members. *Care* is commonly employed with various interpretations (Thomas 1993), yet its precise definition remains elusive (Madörin 2010, p. 86). The concept of care encompasses tending, nurturing, educating, and nursing for individuals (Schilliger 2009,

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p. 99), including children, the elderly, and those with special needs, such as long-term or chronically ill individuals (O'Connor 1996, p. 16). While caring for the elderly and the unwell is inherent in the spectrum of care work, this book distinctly centres on childcare, excluding other forms of care from its primary focus. However, it is worth noting that some elaborations may be applicable to other caregiving concepts.

In the realm of childcare, the lines between childcare tasks and household chores are often blurred. For instance, children might accompany parents during shopping, require supervision during cooking, and as they grow older, actively participate in, for example, tidying up. Furthermore, households with children generally entail more housework, raising the question of whether housework for children should be categorised as care work. This complexity makes it challenging to clearly differentiate between the two. Hence, in the following discussions, the terms *care* and *unpaid work* are used interchangeably, including *housework* due to their inherent overlap, making a distinct separation between care and household tasks difficult.[1]

The imbalance between paid and unpaid work is often discussed in the context of intra-family division of labour, where caregiving becomes economically dependent on paid employment (O'Connor 1996, p. 14). In a traditional role division, this means that a woman engaged in caregiving financially relies on her husband, who shoulders financial responsibilities. However, the reciprocal nature of this dependency is frequently overlooked, as gainful employment is equally dependent on caregiving (O'Connor 1996, p. 14). As a result, a full interdependence exists between these two forms of work. Recognising this, both the EU and the OECD highlight the distribution of gainful employment and family work, advocating for social and economic policies that encourage mothers to participate in the labour market while enhancing the attractiveness of caregiving roles for fathers (Daly 2010, p. 143).

The recognised value of these two types of work sharply contrasts. While paid work is compensated and assigned a specific value, albeit with considerable variation, the same consistency is not applied to care work. Generally, care work is given a lower value in societal assessments (Belser 2010; Fraser 1994; Lewis and Giullari 2005; Schilliger 2009).

There is also a linguistic distinction between the two categories of work. While the term *work*, if not further specified, usually implies *paid work*, the term used in

[1] Accordingly, these two types of work are jointly operationalised as unpaid work in the empirical chapters (see Part IV), as further detailed in Section 8.2 covering the specifics of the survey.

connection with caring for children is *childcare*. This linguistic nuance is underscored by Brandth and Kvande (1998, p. 302), who emphasise the work aspect more explicitly by using the term *parental work*.

Furthermore, the two categories of work also differ in terms of their organisational forms. The form of organisation is crucial because care work cannot be entirely outsourced from the family, and thus the issue of labour division always arises (Lewis and Giullari 2005, p. 88). According to Schilliger (2009, p. 104), care work can be categorised into the following organisational forms: unpaid in households (non-market), state/community (decommodified, where the provision is not solely based on market transactions (Lister 1997, p. 173) but supported by the state), or as commercial services (commodified, subject to market transactions (Lewis et al. 2008, p. 22)). The transition from informal, unpaid care work within households to either of the other two formal organisational forms is crucial for women's participation in the labour market, as highlighted by Lewis and Giullari (2005, p. 83). The concept of defamilialisation is also discussed in the literature in this context, whereby this is defined as the process of diminishing the family's role in providing social security and welfare functions or as a measure to evaluate individual economic independence from familial dependencies (Bambra 2007b, p. 327). Commodification plays a significant role in the policy debate concerning the reconciliation of care work (Lewis and Giullari 2005, p. 87). The focus is on its interaction with women's gainful employment, and this interaction is intended to be achieved through the commodification of care services. However, compared to other areas of the welfare state, policies in this regard are less developed (Lewis and Giullari 2005, p. 88). Moreover, the relatively inadequate structuring of the welfare state in family policy, particularly the scarcity of affordable childcare facilities, has led to an increased demand for informal care solutions, either among (female) friends or through relatives, with grandmothers playing a particularly crucial role (Lewis and Giullari 2005; Lewis et al. 2008; Rupert and Zanella 2018). Described as reasonable and flexible, this support is utilised when formal care work falls short, serving to bridge the gap between commodified, formal care and family-provided care. Given the impossibility of commodifying all care work, the question of division becomes increasingly important – between individuals and the community, as well as between women and men at the household level (Lewis and Giullari 2005, p. 88).

Men, often confined to the role of providers, find their potential contributions to caregiving tasks constrained, while women continue to be predominantly responsible for the emotional and nurturing aspects of care (Gornick and Meyers 2009; Grau Grau et al. 2022; Thébaud 2010). Historically, the realm of caregiving

responsibilities has borne a significant gender bias, with women and especially mothers disproportionately carrying the burden. Despite substantial strides in women's participation in the labour market over the past few decades, the landscape of unpaid work remains overwhelmingly shouldered by women (Craig and Churchill 2021; Craig and Powell 2012; Sullivan 2006; Yavorsky et al. 2015). This persistence is a manifestation of deeply ingrained gender norms, as noted by Craig and Mullan (2011). The gendered division of care work not only perpetuates stereotypes but also sustains existing inequalities by limiting men's involvement in nurturing and emotional caregiving tasks. The prevailing belief that women inherently possess nurturing qualities while men are primarily associated with the provider role reinforces traditional gender norms (Gornick and Meyers 2009; Ranson 2012). Consequently, this perpetuates a rigidly defined gendered division of labour within families.[2]

Moreover, the gender-related division of work in caregiving is intricately intertwined with the gender differences observed in the labour market (Aassve et al. 2014). The lack of female representation in managerial positions poses a persistent obstacle to achieving gender equality in leadership (Mandel and Semyonov 2006). Despite significant progress in women's education over the last few decades, the gender gap in leadership positions persists. In Switzerland, for example, women are now outperforming men in education (Oesch 2023, p. 81). To tackle gender-related workforce issues, a closer examination of labour market segregation is essential. This phenomenon involves the unequal distribution of individuals across occupations and industries based on gender, manifesting in both vertical and horizontal segregation. The former pertains to the underrepresentation of women in top positions, while the latter focuses on gender disparities between different occupations (Hook et al. 2023, p. 280). Despite progress in promoting gender equality, labour market segregation remains a significant challenge in contemporary society. Mandel and Semyonov (2006) explore the impact of the welfare state on this issue, noting that developed welfare states encourage women's workforce participation but often fall short in leading them into influential roles. In nations with progressive policies and a substantial public service sector, there is a tendency for women to cluster in traditionally female-dominated occupations. Consequently, this concentration results in almost no women in leadership positions, further reinforcing the persistent barrier to achieving gender equality in management (Mandel and Semyonov 2006).

[2] These gender norms and role models, emphasising women as primary caregivers, are also reflected in informal long-term care provided solely by daughters in mixed-siblings families (Barigozzi et al. 2020).

Despite progress in promoting gender equality, persistent gender imbalances in certain occupations and industries perpetuate an ongoing cycle of inequality. From a household perspective, the specific allocation of paid work along gender lines, contributing to gender-based wage disparities, makes it economically rational for women to take on unpaid care work (O'Connor 1996, p. 17). Rooted in historical gender roles, occupational stereotypes restrict career choices, limiting opportunities to break away from traditional expectations. Research highlights the significant impact of gendered occupational stereotypes on vocational decisions, revealing that individuals often align their career preferences with stereotypes associated with their gender identity, thereby contributing to and perpetuating labour market segregation (see, e.g., Gupta et al. 2009; He et al. 2019). This segregation is further compounded by various reinforcing factors, such as wage gaps, creating a cycle of inequality. In their comprehensive study on the gender wage gap, Blau and Kahn (2017) concluded that the persistence of the unexplained gap suggests ongoing labour-market discrimination, supported by experimental evidence, particularly evident in high-skilled occupations where factors like workforce interruptions and shorter hours play a significant role. They highlighted the continued importance of gender differences in the labour market, specifically in occupation and industry distribution, and identified traditional factors such as gender roles, the division of labour, and motherhood penalties as still relevant in understanding the dynamics of the gender pay gap. The enduring gender wage gap serves as both a symptom and a cause, reflecting the undervaluation of work associated with one gender and acting as a deterrent for individuals to enter higher-paying fields.

Breaking free from these deeply embedded patterns necessitates profound societal changes. Mere increases in women's participation in the labour force, as significant as they are, do not fundamentally alter these dynamics. Instead, such shifts often translate into an additional burden on women (Craig and Mullan 2011), who must now juggle both professional and caregiving responsibilities and the mental load that goes along with it (Dean et al. 2022). It becomes evident that breaking the cycle of the gendered division of care work requires not just incremental adjustments but a holistic reevaluation of societal expectations and gender roles (Grau Grau et al. 2022). In conclusion, challenging the entrenched norms surrounding caregiving responsibilities demands a comprehensive approach that transcends conventional gender roles. Policy interventions in family matters can influence these mechanisms. However, prior to delving into the field of reconciliation policy in Chapter 4, an overview of the most common family models is warranted in the next section.

3.2 Family Models

In order to deepen the understanding of the intricate interplay between care work division and paid employment within family structures, an exploration into various family models[3] becomes essential. As highlighted by Fraser (1994), distinct family models serve as crucial frameworks for comprehending the dynamics at play. The responsibilities within a family can be systematically categorised through the lens of different family models, taking into account not only the intra-family division of tasks related to gainful employment and care work but also considering additional dimensions such as the societal value ascribed to certain types of work and the pursuit of gender equality ideals. In this regard, these models serve not only to categorise different forms of organisation by families but also as a frame of reference for what is considered the norm in a particular society. They are also promoted by corresponding family policy measures. In other words, the categorisation of family models also serves as a conceptualisation to classify different approaches of family policy regimes. Embedded in the concept of the term 'model' are the prevailing societal ideals, norms, and values that delineate typical representations concerning the family and the integration of women and men in society (Pfau-Effinger 2004, p. 382). These family models, as elucidated by Ciccia and Bleijenbergh (2014, p. 55), encompass a spectrum of features, including the allocation of tasks between genders with respect to both gainful employment and caregiving duties, financial dependencies, and the foundational ideal of gender equality. The complexity of family dynamics is encapsulated within these models, providing a nuanced understanding of how families navigate the balance between work and care.

While the concept of family models has been touched upon previously, it is now opportune to delve into a more systematic and comprehensive presentation and discussion of these models. This exploration aims to shed light on the diversity of family structures and the multifaceted nature of the roles played by individuals within them. A concise overview of these family models and their key features is presented in Table 3.1. This tabulation serves as a valuable reference point, encapsulating the nuances inherent in each family model, thereby fostering a deeper appreciation for the intricacies of care work division and paid employment within the family unit.

[3] As stated in the introduction, this study examines the gendered divisions of labour between parents and only discusses heterosexual couples. Therefore, only family models that assume one father and one mother per family are included.

Table 3.1 Overview of family models

Family models	Paid work	Care	Responsibilities	Value attribution
Male Breadwinner	Father	Mother	Provider: Father Care: Mother	Paid work > Care
Modernised Male Breadwinner	Father: Full-time Mother: Part-time	Mother / External	Provider: Father Care: Mother	Paid work > Care
Female Breadwinner	Mother	–	Provider: Mother Care: –	Paid work > Care
Caregiver Parity	Father	Mother	Provider: Father Care: Mother	Paid work = Care
Universal Breadwinner	Parents: Full-time	External	Provider: Parents Care: Mother	Paid work > Care
Universal Caregiver	Parents: Part-time	Parents / External	Provider: Parents Care: Parents	Paid work = Care

Source: Prepared by the author.

3.2.1 The Male Breadwinner Family Model

The – already mentioned several times – classic traditional male breadwinner model is rooted in "an ideology of separate gender roles" (Ciccia and Bleijenbergh 2014, p. 55). This model, often associated with traditional or patriarchal family structures, represents a social and economic arrangement where the man shoulders the primary responsibility of earning the family income, while the woman's primary role revolves around homemaking and caregiving.

In the male breadwinner model, men are expected to be the sole economic providers, usually through full-time employment outside the home to ensure financial stability and meet the family's economic needs. Therefore, this model is closely linked to the logic of a "family wage" (Fraser 1994, p. 591): emphasising that the man's income must be sufficiently high to support the entire family.

Women, on the other hand, are typically assigned the role of homemaker and caregiver within this model. The mother's responsibilities revolve around managing the household, raising children, and providing care to elderly family members. Importantly, as she herself does not receive a wage for her work, she becomes

financially dependent on her husband's income or on social benefits tied to her status as wife or mother (Ciccia and Bleijenbergh 2014, p. 55). Through her exclusion from the labour market and, therefore, from paid work, her subordination to her husband, also in terms of social security entitlements and tax benefits, is reinforced and expecting her to undertake caregiving responsibilities "without public support" (Lewis 1992, p. 162).

This family model also aligns with the "cultural construct of 'motherhood'", where the mother's primary duty is viewed as the care and upbringing of children within the home (Pfau-Effinger 2004, p. 384). Consequently, fathers, while expected to provide for their families, are generally not expected to take direct responsibility for childcare, but rather assume the role of the occasionally helper (Ciccia and Verloo 2012, p. 511).

It is crucial to note that the dominance of this model was not universal, and historical variations existed (Pfau-Effinger 2004, p. 378). Since women have consistently participated in the workforce, a pure male breadwinner model never universally prevailed (Lewis 2001, p. 153). However, in specific historical periods and social classes, the male breadwinner model was more accurate, notably in substantial segments of the middle and working classes in Western countries after the second World War (Lewis 1992, 2001). In summary, the male breadwinner model, although not universally dominant, has played a significant role in shaping family dynamics, reinforcing distinct gender roles, and influencing the economic and social structures within various historical and social contexts.

3.2.2 The Modernised Male Breadwinner Family Model

In more recent times, the predominant family model that defines the labour market pattern in most European countries is the one-and-a-half earner model (Lewis 2001, p. 154). Often regarded as a modern version of the traditional male breadwinner model, it is also referred to as the modernised male breadwinner model or dual-earner/female-part-time-carer model (Ciccia and Bleijenbergh 2014; Crompton 1999). In this model, the father retains the role of the main provider, while the mother is also involved in paid work, typically in a part-time capacity and often at a low percentage rate.

If the mother is employed outside the home alongside the father, external childcare becomes necessary during this period. *External* in this context, however,

simply means outside the nuclear family and does not strictly imply institutional solutions like childcare facilities; it could also involve support from friends, neighbours, or grandparents. Grandparents, particularly grandmothers, play a crucial role in this scenario (Lewis and Giullari 2005), as reflected in the employment behaviour of grandmothers. For instance, in the United States, there is a notable reduction in labour supply reported for working grandmothers at the birth of their first grandchild (Rupert and Zanella 2018).

Countries that promote this family model do actively encourage and support women in pursuing careers and contributing to the family income, leading to a more equitable distribution of financial responsibilities. However, men are still traditionally viewed as the primary breadwinners and are, thus, expected to mainly contribute to the family income. Despite the increasing prevalence of modern couples with dual-career aspirations, where both partners pursue fulfilling careers outside the home, the previous discussion on labour market segregation and wage differences in Section 3.1 underscores the lingering high financial dependence of women on their male partners.

While men are encouraged to take a more active role in caregiving, the core responsibilities persist. This is evident when examining specific childcare tasks, as the time allocation gap between parents is smaller in "recreational[4] or 'fun' child care" (Raley et al. 2012, p. 1437) compared to physical[5] or routine care, such as feeding children – tasks that are predominantly shouldered by mothers.

In this modernised version of the male breadwinner model, where mothers also engage in gainful employment, it becomes evident that despite their involvement in the workforce, the fundamental patterns and responsibilities remain largely unchanged. Thus, there are no substantial alterations to the core structure of the classic male breadwinner model.

3.2.3 The Female Breadwinner Family Model

The female breadwinner model is frequently overlooked in socio-political analyses, although this model reflects the lifestyle of approximately five percent of

[4] Recreational activities form a subset of engagements that involve playing with children, engaging in arts and crafts, talking to them, and assisting them in activities unrelated to their education (Raley et al. 2012, pp. 1433–1434).

[5] Physical care activities encompass fundamental caregiving tasks undertaken by parents to safeguard the physical well-being of children. These activities involve tasks like feeding, dressing, and providing medical care to children (Raley et al. 2012, p. 1433).

households[6] in Europe (Kowalewska and Vitali 2021); hence, it is important to include it in the discussion of the most common and central family models. As the name suggests, in this model, the woman serves as the primary provider. Strictly speaking, one could distinguish between a *pure* female breadwinner model, where the man is not employed, and a *one-and-a-half* female breadwinner model, where the woman is employed full-time and the man is employed part-time (Kowalewska and Vitali 2021).

This family structure is evolving (Kowalewska and Vitali 2021, p. 138), as the gender equality movement is and could, therefore, be wrongly interpreted as a shift reflecting changes in societal attitudes, economic dynamics, and an increased emphasis on gender equality. Since in this model, women take on the role of the primary income earners, while men may assume more active roles in caregiving and household responsibilities, it seems to represent a departure from traditional gender roles, challenging the historical norm where men have been the primary earners in families. However, a more in-depth examination of female breadwinner families reveals that this family structure is frequently not a voluntary choice. Instead, the precarious economic situation, coupled with unemployment, often leads to the adoption of such a model (Dotti Sani 2018; Kowalewska and Vitali 2021). Different studies have demonstrated a significantly high unemployment rate among men in households with female breadwinners, where women often take on the main provider role due to economic pressure, particularly in the context of poorly qualified partners (Dotti Sani 2018; Kowalewska and Vitali 2021). While some families align with the egalitarian image and deliberately construct their family structure to adhere to gender equity norms, this represents only a portion of the reality. A larger contingent of female breadwinners, emphasised by Drago et al. (2005), emerges due to economic hardship. This group is likely even larger than commonly assumed: Cross-sectional estimates of female breadwinning can be misleading, as couples' reliance on women's earnings fluctuates over time; persistent long-term female breadwinning is less prevalent, and temporary instances defy the typical portrayal of this phenomenon (Drago et al. 2005).

[6] According to an analysis covering 20 European countries, over 5 percent of households with two heterosexual cohabiting spouses/partners aged 18 to 65, have female breadwinners, although this analysis includes not only parents but couples without children as well (Kowalewska and Vitali 2021). Another study, utilising the same survey data as the empirical analysis in this thesis, exclusively focuses on households with at least one pre-school-aged child (Stadelmann-Steffen et al. 2024). It reveals that the occurrence of female breadwinner households ranges from two (Germany) to six percent (the United States), varying by country.

This observation reinforces the argument that this family model is frequently not a matter of choice but rather a (temporary) necessity.

The distinction between the two female breadwinner groups is further evident in the employment patterns of men: women in one-and-a-half female breadwinner couples not only possess a socioeconomic status surpassing that of women of pure female breadwinner couples but also boast the highest average labour income among women across all couple constellations (Kowalewska and Vitali 2021, p. 137).

Given the diverse backgrounds leading to a female breadwinner model, clear allocation of unpaid work and responsibilities across different forms of work, as illustrated in Table 3.1, becomes challenging. In families actively selecting this structure in line with egalitarian gender roles, fathers are expected to play an active role in parenting, undertaking a substantial portion of unpaid work. Conversely, men from households facing economic insecurity may be less committed to gender role reversal and participate less in childcare and housework, indicating a potential desire for a return to the traditional male breadwinner family structure, but the economic circumstances of this group raise uncertainty about the feasibility of such a shift due to labour market constraints (Drago et al. 2005).

The exploration of this family model is particularly intriguing as it underscores the lasting impact of traditional male breadwinner norms in our society. The depth of this ideal's entrenchment becomes apparent in the life satisfaction of female breadwinner couples. Those deviating from the traditional norm in work division tend to have lower life satisfaction compared to those following more traditional labour divisions, especially when the man is unemployed, and although variations exist between countries, these distinctions are evident across Europe (Kowalewska and Vitali 2023).

3.2.4 The Caregiver Parity Family Model

The caregiver parity model preserves traditional gender roles while assigning them more equal value (Ciccia and Bleijenbergh 2014, p. 55). Despite women continuing to bear the responsibility for childcare, the model acknowledges the worth of their unpaid work through the provision of generous benefits, such as substantial care allowances. Acknowledging the significance of childbirth, child-rearing, and informal domestic tasks alongside formal employment aims to guarantee similar levels of respect and well-being for both caregivers and breadwinners (Fraser 1994, p. 606). The state compensations for women are tied to their caring role, what aligns with the concept of *maternalism* (Ciccia 2017,

p. 2765) – elevating women's nurturing roles and associated values to societal ideals resulting in gendered policies that promote women as full-time caregivers (Orloff 2006).

Moreover, this model is linked to the concept of *familialism*, which advocates for family-led childcare. States that explicitly endorse parents taking care of their children themselves by providing public funds contribute to the promotion of a caregiver parity model (Javornik 2014, p. 242). So within this model "caregivers receive subsidies to provide care at home" (Morgan 2009, p. 44). These allowances should be substantial enough to adequately support a family, aligning with a wage equivalent to that of a breadwinner (Fraser 1994).

Fraser (1994) initially formulated the caregiver parity family model[7] as a contrasting counterpart to the traditional male breadwinner model – an ideal wherein policies supporting this family structure would foster gender equality. This perspective aligns with the political approach of many Western European feminists and social democrats, seeking to advance gender equality primarily through the acknowledgement of unpaid care work (Fraser 1994, p. 605). "It treats caregiving as intrinsically valuable, not as a mere obstacle to employment, thus challenging the view that only men's traditional activities are fully human" (Fraser 1994, p. 609). The goal is to make the gender difference costless[8] (Littleton 1991) and not to equalise gender by achieving parity between the lives of women with those of men (Fraser 1994, p. 606).

Even if the valuation of care work increases, encouraging its dedicated pursuit, and the acknowledgement of care intensifies, the equivalence of value between care and paid work is questionable. Fraser (1994) echoes such reservations, noting that while caregiving gains more respect in this model, the persistent association of caregiving with femininity and breadwinning with masculinity, coupled with economic disparities, makes achieving true parity between the two roles unlikely.

[7] Fraser (1994) considers the possibility of caring women being part-time employed, emphasising the importance of flexibility in transitioning between caregiving and paid work, along with opportunities for part-time employment. However, my definition of the caregiver parity model is more narrow, excluding part-time employment. This narrower definition is justified as I further discuss the modernised male breadwinner model, and a clear distinction between these two models is crucial to avoid confusion. Many European welfare states support female employment while also offering childcare allowances, which may seem to align with the caregiver parity model. However, since this support does not alter the value attribution, and caregiving remains less valued than paid work, it does not align with the ideal version of the caregiver parity model discussed by Fraser (1994).

[8] In the context of the United States, Littleton (1991, p. 49) suggests that the government consider providing mothers with the same wages and benefits as those received by soldiers to minimise the economic impact of gender differences.

She argues that envisioning "separate but equal" gender roles is deemed insufficient for genuine equality. If gender equality is viewed as equal opportunities or roles for both genders, this model results in a decrease in equality, as the recognition of care creates negative incentives for women's participation in the labour market (Häusermann 2006, p. 6). While the caregiver parity model addresses income inequality and the undervaluation of care work, its lack of concern about the gendered distribution of labour further results in limited incentives for men to engage in caregiving (Yamashita 2016, p. 436). Due to current cultural norms and socialisation, men are less likely to opt for the caregiving track at the same rate as women and prevailing labour market conditions make it more advantageous for men to be the primary breadwinners in heterosexual couples, reinforcing traditional gender associations with the two employment tracks (Fraser 1994, p. 608). Consequently, this model can exacerbate inequality, making it more challenging for women in the labour market compared to the male breadwinner model, as gender-related associations are reinforced. In essence, this family model "does not value caregiving enough to demand that men do it too; it does not ask men to change" (Fraser 1994, pp. 609–610).

3.2.5 The Universal Breadwinner Family Model

The universal breadwinner model is characterised by both parents engaging in paid work full-time (Ciccia 2017; Fraser 1994). In the literature, it is also referred to as the *adult-worker model*, assuming the full integration of all adults into the labour market (Lewis 2001, p. 154). In this model, both men and women are fully immersed in the workforce, a departure from the male breadwinner model. Unlike the modernised male breadwinner model, where only part of the care needs to be outsourced, the universal breadwinner model necessitates complete outsourcing of care. Fraser (1994) describes this model next to the caregiver parity model as replacement and proposed solutions to replace the traditional male breadwinner and in their ideal forms as gender-equitable alternatives. In opposition to the caregiver parity model, in the universal breadwinner model gender equality is characterised by the equality or similarity between genders – "equal obligations gender sameness" (Ciccia and Verloo 2012, p. 511).

It is precisely this gender egalitarian approach that makes this model not only a theoretically discussed ideal (as in Fraser (1994), for example) but also a policy ideal. The Scandinavian countries are frequently highlighted as a prime example, where diverse family policies actively promote the universal breadwinner model, contributing to its widespread adoption (Ellingsaeter 1999, pp. 41; Kowalewska

and Vitali 2021, p. 129). Merely encouraging women to enter the workforce, such as through the provision of childcare facilities,[9] falls short. As Fraser (1994) emphasises, the success of these efforts hinges on an additional factor: the implementation of macroeconomic policies aimed at generating full-time, high-paying, and secure employment for women. "These would have to be true breadwinner jobs in the primary labour force, carrying full, first-class social-insurance entitlements. Social insurance, finally, is central to universal breadwinner. The aim here is to bring women up to parity with men in an institution that has traditionally disadvantaged them" (Fraser 1994, p. 602). In many places, women's employment has been promoted since Fraser (1994) wrote down her thoughts on egalitarian family models, and has increased significantly. However, labour market segregation in terms of gender is a prevalent problem, as discussed in the previous section.

Another problem lies in the attribution of value. The idea that families should be freed from care responsibilities leads to the undervaluation of care work and, therefore, tasks relating to the household and children remain worthless in comparison to traditional gainful employment (Ciccia and Verloo 2012). Parental care continues to be significantly undervalued, identified as a barrier to individuals' complete engagement in the workforce. Consequently, the objective is not merely to increase men's involvement in unpaid labour but rather to reduce the burden on women (Ciccia and Bleijenbergh 2014, p. 52). Thus, childcare must be delegated to the realms of the state or market – transferred from the family environment to formal institutions. However, this is accompanied by two further problems: Firstly, care cannot be fully outsourced and secondly, the care responsibility overwhelmingly stays with mothers. The subsequent section delves deeper into elucidating these dual challenges.

[9] The widespread assumption that women's employment relies on public service availability, and that public service provision reflects a "dual earner" gender ideology (Orloff 2002, p. 12), does not capture an important distinction: In the context of international comparisons and the diverse contexts shaped by family policy regimes, there is another aspect to be addressed within the framework of the universal breadwinner model: The differentiation between societies characterised by a dual-earner/state-carer model and those featuring a dual-earner/marketised-carer model (Crompton 1999). While both models show high rates of maternal employment, the "state-caregiver" model, found in countries like state socialist nations during the 1980s, is characterised by robust public childcare systems, contrasting with the "market-caregiver" model predominant in the United States, where mothers heavily rely on private market care arrangements for their children (Gornick and Meyers 2009, p. 16). Ciccia (2017) draws a similar distinction, categorising the universal breadwinner model into "supported" and "unsupported". In her analysis, Scandinavian countries, in particular, exhibit elements of the supported model.

In theory, the labour division in this family model is straightforward: both parents are full-time involved in paid work, and external care is provided for the children during this time – with childcare responsibilities primarily resting on the state, while parents assume a limited role (Ciccia and Verloo 2012; Crompton, 1999). However, the reality of everyday family life is seldom so uncomplicated. A prevalent practical challenge for working parents is the care of sick children, a responsibility that falls predominantly on mothers rather than fathers (Boye 2015; Eriksson and Nermo 2010). This common example highlights a fundamental point – the burden of care responsibility persists with the mother (Gornick and Meyers 2009, p. 17), even when she is fully employed. Fraser (1994) herself also admits that the model has its weaknesses, as "[s]ome things, such as childbearing, attending to family emergencies, and much parenting work, cannot be shifted" (Fraser 1994, p. 604) and other tasks that are eventually commodified do not vanish completely; instead, they generate new and time-consuming coordination responsibilities. This further touches upon the previously mentioned issue (at the end of Section 3.1) surrounding mental load. Lewis and Giullari (2005, pp. 84–85) emphasise that care involves intricate personal and emotional dimensions that resist easy commodification. They draw a distinction between active and passive care, illustrating the latter as non-physical presence, such as mothers concurrently contemplating their jobs while concerned about their children's well-being. Despite the growing availability of commodified care services, the authors delve into the spatial and temporal fragmentation within family life. This phenomenon, despite commodified options, introduces challenges in managing caregiving responsibilities, especially for mothers. They conclude that the demand for both organisational and personal aspects of care work remains high. This underscores a persistent need for caregiving through parents, even with the emergence of commodified care services.

The universal breadwinner model, by not challenging cultural norms that designate women with primary responsibility for unpaid work, may lead to women bearing a dual burden due to conflicting expectations of being both a full-time worker and a dedicated caregiver (Ciccia and Bleijenbergh 2014, p. 52). Without significant shifts in how society values caregiving and social norms, and thus without changes in the gendered distribution of care responsibilities, the workload for women is likely to increase substantially. In the context of the universal breadwinner model, where women take on additional employment alongside their caregiving duties – essentially working a second shift – this issue becomes particularly pronounced (Fraser 1994). The concept of the *second shift*, coined by Hochschild (1989), encapsulates the prevalent issue of gender imbalance in domestic work, referring to the additional unpaid housework and caregiving

responsibilities often disproportionately shouldered by women after official working hours. Despite progress in gender equality within the professional sphere, societal norms and cultural expectations persist in assigning women the primary responsibility for household chores and childcare.

Consequently, many women navigate a dual role, managing professional commitments during the day and undertaking a second shift of domestic duties upon returning home. It's worth noting that while time inequalities between the sexes have evolved over time, a "new" inequality emerges, marked by disparities in available leisure time (Sayer 2005).

In her strongly normative analysis, Fraser (1994) defines the universal breadwinner and caregiver parity models very narrowly, describing them as "highly utopian visions". However, even in this highly idealised form, these models, as has now been explained and also been recognised by Fraser (1994), do not result in complete gender equality and exhibit negative aspects that warrant further exploration and call for another – truly gender egalitarian – model.

3.2.6 The Universal Caregiver Family Model

To address the limitations of the previously discussed family models and advance gender equity, Fraser (1994) proposes a genuinely egalitarian model. This model goes beyond equalising gender roles, extending its egalitarian ethos to value paid and unpaid work equally. Fraser (1994, p. 611) envisions "a postindustrial welfare state that combines the best of universal breadwinner with the best of caregiver parity, while jettisoning the worst features of each". According to her, the achievement of gender equity entails making women's current life patterns – often involving both breadwinning and caregiving – the societal norm. To realise this vision, the welfare state must actively prompt men to embrace similar life patterns and reform institutions to mitigate challenges associated with these dual roles. Her transformative approach seeks to dismantle the gendered dichotomy between breadwinning and caregiving, integrating and destigmatising these activities while fostering shared responsibilities across genders.

Although Fraser (1994) does not explicitly label this model, several feminist welfare-state researchers, inspired by her concept, have named it *universal caregiver model* (Ciccia and Bleijenbergh 2014; Ciccia and Verloo 2012), *universal carer/worker-worker/carer model* (Lewis and Giullari 2005, p. 97), *dual-earner/dual-carer* or *dual-earner/dual-caregiver model* (Crompton 1999; Gornick and

Meyers 2003, 2009). While the universal caregiver model has replaced the universal breadwinner model as an ideal in social science research, it has not been fully implemented in any welfare system's family policies to date, remaining an ideal (Ciccia and Verloo 2012, p. 520). Fraser (1994)'s concept left a profound impact on the field as it introduced a novel perspective, shifting away from a primary focus on women. Instead, it advocates for substantial change in men, urging them "to become more like most women are now – that is, people who do primary care work" (Fraser 1994, p. 611).

The universal caregiver model depicts part-time working parents who collaboratively shoulder care responsibilities, thereby both engaging in caregiving (Ciccia and Verloo 2012). This model fundamentally diverges from traditional male and universal breadwinner models in two ways: firstly, as it entails a shift in paternal behaviour and secondly, as it attributes equal value to care and paid work. Unlike the female breadwinner model, economic pressure is not a primary driver in the universal caregiver model; instead, it is rooted in fundamental gender egalitarian values. The model aims at promoting gender equity through the promotion of an egalitarian involvement in both paid and unpaid work among men and women (Fraser 1994). Ciccia and Verloo (2012, p. 511) further characterise the model as embodying "transformative gender sameness", emphasising its capacity to bring about substantial changes in gender roles both within and beyond the labour market. This transformation extends beyond the workplace, as seen in the transfer of caregiving responsibilities from mothers to fathers (Fraser 1994). Simultaneously, within the workforce, the model advocates for the recognition of equal rights for both parents, enabling them to reduce their paid work hours in favour of childcare (Gornick and Meyers 2009, p. 17). As both men and women are expected to equally participate in both work and caregiving, the responsibility for care extends to both families and public entities such as the state and employers (Ciccia and Bleijenbergh 2014, p. 56). Nevertheless, the primary responsibility for the care of very young children is predominantly assigned to the household setting (Ciccia and Verloo 2012, p. 511). In this family model, the significance of care is acknowledged, fostering various caregiving arrangements, both by parents and non-parental figures, to enhance the well-being of children (Gornick and Meyers 2009, p. 17).

While the universal caregiver family model represents an ideal of shared caregiving responsibilities, achieving it may face challenges rooted in cultural norms, societal expectations and ingrained gender roles. As already mentioned, unlike the universal breadwinner model, the universal caregiver model places a significantly higher value on care. Hence, a fundamental re-conceptualisation of care is imperative, recognising its importance "in terms of reproductive work and as a

source of personal fulfilment" (Ciccia and Verloo 2012, p. 509). This perspective acknowledges that access to care should be equally available to both women and men. In this context, Lewis and Giullari (2005) emphasise the value of providing genuine choice between employment and caregiving. According to them, crafting social policies that enable such choice is challenging yet crucial, as both employment and care are indispensable for human flourishing. Viewing care and work as non-negotiable for human welfare, the choice between them is characterised more by tragedy than opportunity. In that respect, addressing policies that shape individuals' choices becomes paramount (Lewis and Giullari 2005).

Building upon this perspective, I argue that the universal caregiver model – as the only family model that truly promotes gender equity – meets the normative ideals of liberal democracies; it champions freedom of choice, allowing families to align with their unique norms and values. As concisely expressed by Gornick and Meyers (2003, p. 92), it is "fundamentally gender egalitarian". Policies aiming at other family models endorse specific family structures and tend to be strongly normative, being restrictive of individual freedom of choice and hindering alternative arrangements. Therefore, the focus is on family policies that create conditions for each family to organise itself based on its preferences and needs. Establishing structures facilitating both mothers and fathers engaging in gainful employment and caregiving, as embodied by a universal caregiver model, enables families to tailor arrangements to their individual needs within these possibilities.

To realise a genuine choice between paid work and care, specific policies are necessary, encompassing "time to care, cash for care, care services, and the regulation of working hours" (Lewis and Giullari 2005, p. 96). Lewis and Giullari (2005, p. 97) describe affordable, available and high-quality care options as well as financial support for care work as central components for any approach to such a model, in addition to the provision of time for care work. High-quality publicly funded childcare services universally accessible to all is also one key aspect of the policy package conceptualised by Gornick and Meyers (2009). They advocate for substantial paid leave for both mothers and fathers individually, along with regulations on working hours to limit full-time work and improve the accessibility and quality of part-time job opportunities. These labour market characteristics go hand in hand with Fraser (1994)'s elaborations, where all jobs acknowledge individuals also as caregivers. In her vision, every job would entail a shorter work week compared to current full-time standards and include services that facilitate employment. However, distinct from the universal breadwinner model, Fraser (1994) argues against the assumption that all care work should be shifted entirely to social services. Instead, she advocates for public

support of certain informal care work, integrating it seamlessly "with paid work in a single social-insurance system" (Fraser 1994, p. 612).

In delving deeper into the overarching policy framework of the social state, Fraser (1994, p. 592) elucidates that conventional welfare state models, rooted in presumptions of male-headed families and secure employment, no longer offer effective protection against uncertainties. This underscores the imperative for a paradigm shift towards a postindustrial welfare state, she states, tailored to the modern intricacies of employment and reproduction. In the forthcoming chapter, I delve into the landscape of family policy within postindustrial welfare states, examining the complex interplay between specific reconciliation policies and the dynamics of employment and care.

Reconciliation Policies and Gendered Division of Labour

4

Having concluded in the previous chapter that the universal caregiver model is the model that would genuinely foster gender equality, in this chapter, a literature overview delves into the historical evolution of family policy research, tracing its development. Focusing on contemporary studies within the realm of welfare states, I explore the transformation from traditional male breadwinner models to the modern-day emphasis on "employment for all". Moving beyond conceptual frameworks, I critically assess the influence of reconciliation policies, specifically childcare services and parental leave schemes, on female labour market participation and their broader impact on gendered work patterns within households. As I navigate through the state of research, I discuss the nuanced effects of these policies on childcare, maternal employment, and the evolving roles of fathers. However, the debate on whether reconciliation policies lead to a truly egalitarian family model persists, highlighting the need for ongoing research in this field.

4.1 Family Policy and Female Labour Market Participation

Family policy research emerged in the early twentieth century, marked by the initial cross-national studies that began comparing family policies across the globe (Gauthier and Koops 2018, p. 11). Four distinct research lines, as outlined by Gauthier and Koops (2018, p. 11), have since evolved: (1) early comparative cross-national research with a descriptive focus, (2) subsequent studies on regimes and typology development, (3) a quantitative perspective exploring determinants of family policies, and (4) a recent literature expansion examining the outcomes of family policies. Within this fourth strand of research lines, contemporary research on welfare states has extensively explored the influence of

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social policies on gender relations, revealing that modern welfare systems have historically relied on a male breadwinner model (see, e.g., Daly 2010; Lewis 1992, 2001; Mahon 2002; O'Connor 1993; Orloff 1993, 2010; Pateman 2006; Sainsbury 1994b). Despite not reflecting the reality of all families, the post-war decades saw a degree of convergence towards the male breadwinner model (Lewis 2001; Mahon 2002). But subsequent changes in women's labour market participation, educational attainment and changing family structures have led to a gradual departure from the traditional male breadwinner/female home-maker model in many affluent welfare democracies (Oláh 2011), marking a shift towards "employment for all" (Orloff 2006, p. 230) as opposed to maternalist policies (see, e.g., Crompton 2001; Leitner 2003; Lewis 2001; Mahon 2002).

In recent decades, substantial research has explored the influence of reconciliation policies, specifically childcare services and parental leave schemes, on female labour market participation and the broader division of labour within households. Regarding **childcare policies**, the literature consistently finds that the provision of childcare is positively correlated with increased maternal employment (Ferragina 2019). Childcare policies play a pivotal role in reshaping traditional work-family dynamics for mothers. By partially or fully relieving them of childcare responsibilities, these policies open avenues for increased maternal employment. This redistribution of caregiving to external institutions not only lightens individual burdens but also signals societal acceptance of working mothers. Scholars such as Blofield and Martínez Franzoni (2015), Gangl and Ziefle (2015), Hook and Paek (2020), and Mahon (2002) have extensively examined the transformative impact of childcare policies on work-family relationships. This shift challenges traditional norms, fostering an environment that embraces the dual roles of working and motherhood. Cross-national studies suggest that the effectiveness of childcare policies in enhancing maternal employment is intricately linked to policy design factors. These factors include access to childcare services (Morrissey 2017), affordability (Bütler 2007; Mahon 2011; Morrissey 2017; Vuri 2016), quality (Hegewisch and Gornick 2011, p. 128), and the availability of extended time slots (Iten et al. 2005). The probability of women remaining in the labour market or taking up employment after childbirth is highest when childcare services are available, affordable, of good quality, and cover extended time slots (Hegewisch and Gornick 2011, p. 128).

In contrast to the straightforward impact of childcare services on maternal employment, the ramifications of **parental leave schemes** on labour force participation are more nuanced. While on one hand, "parental leave schemes have

the potential to shore up women's employment" (Ray et al. 2010, p. 198), preventing their permanent exit from the labour market after childbirth and reducing job turnover (Ray et al. 2010), on the other hand, there is a widespread scientific consensus that these schemes may have adverse and potentially counterproductive effects on maternal employment. The crux of this contradiction lies in the specific policy design (more on specific parental leave policy design in Chapter 5). The length of leave, monetary compensation, as well as opportunities and incentives for leave distribution between parents vary widely across policies (Koslowski et al. 2020). In this vein, various authors contend that choosing an extended period of maternal leave decreases the chances of mothers engaging in employment, given that prolonged leaves result in a decline of their human capital and render them less appealing to potential employers (Datta Gupta et al. 2008; Gangl and Ziefle 2015; Gornick and Meyers 2003; Jaumotte 2004; Lalive and Zweimüller 2009; Morgan and Zippel 2003). Contrarily, short to moderate maternal leaves, coupled with provisions for paternity leave and monetary compensations, not only increase the probability of mothers resuming the same employment after the leave period but also mitigate the comparative disadvantage and wage penalty linked to motherhood (Gornick and Meyers 2003). So, this comparative disadvantage can partly be countered by making leaves shareable between mothers and fathers, promoting paternal co-responsibility (Blofield and Martínez Franzoni 2015). To encourage fathers to take leave, a combination of generous income-related benefits and a father's quota appears essential (Karu and Tremblay 2017). With regard to monetary compensation, current research suggests that unpaid leave periods reduce the employment probability of mothers, as women may quit work before childbirth and, thus, not return to their job after the leave (see, e.g., Boushey 2008).

Furthermore, the effectiveness of diverse policy measures in reconciling work and family relations is contingent upon their specific designs (Olivetti and Petrongolo 2017; Stadelmann-Steffen 2011). The impact of these measures is not only influenced by their design but also by the broader policy and cultural context within which they operate. Various research highlights the contextual factors shaping the outcomes of policy interventions (Boeckmann et al. 2015; Budig et al. 2012; Ciccia and Bleijenbergh 2014; Cooke 2011; Daly and Ferragina 2018; Gangl and Ziefle 2015; Meyers et al. 1999; Michel and Mahon 2002; Pfau-Effinger 2005; Vuri 2016). Moreover, numerous scholars have delved into the normative ideals that underlie different reconciliation strategies, as well as the resulting policy configurations and combinations. Ferragina (2019), Gornick and Meyers (2003), Leitner (2003), Lewis (2001), and Olivetti and Petrongolo (2017)

are among those who have contributed to discussions on the normative foundations of diverse policy approaches aimed at facilitating the balance between work and family responsibilities. Understanding these normative ideals is crucial for evaluating the potential success and impact of policy measures in fostering a more egalitarian distribution of work and family life. Thus, the effectiveness of childcare and parental leave policies in shaping family models depends on their alignment towards common goals. For example, generous childcare policies are most effective when accompanied by leave policies that promote father's involvement in childcare from the beginning (Ciccia and Bleijenbergh 2014). Policy interactions and their alignment with broader policy regimes are crucial considerations in understanding the impact of reconciliation policies on gendered work patterns (Daly and Ferragina 2018).

4.2 The Impact of Reconciliation Policies on Gendered Work Patterns

The previous section examined the impact of reconciliation policies on mothers' employment. This section will expand the discussion to include unpaid work and the division of work within the household. It will show that reconciliation policies can influence gender norms, increase paternal involvement in care and household duties, and thus promote egalitarian family models. However, the precise design of the policy is crucial.

Summarising the literature, reconciliation policies are recognised as vital in promoting female labour market participation, especially during children's earliest years. However, the question of whether these policies contribute to a more egalitarian division of labour beyond the labour market is debated. Some evidence suggests that reconciliation policies may indeed influence gender-specific labour patterns beyond the workforce, impacting childcare and household responsibilities (Stadelmann-Steffen and Oehrli 2017). In other words, these policies may have normative effects, not only shaping individuals' attitudes toward gender roles but also indirectly influencing their behaviour in terms of labour allocation (Hook 2006; Stadelmann-Steffen and Oehrli 2017).

The rationale, on the one hand, is that the resources and opportunities available to employed mothers grow, enhancing their bargaining power within the household (Greenstein 2000; Hook 2010). In this context, Sullivan et al. (2009) show that the allocation of time by fathers and mothers to childcare activities correlates with the policy landscape in Norway, Sweden, and the United Kingdom. Furthermore, Hook (2010) provides evidence suggesting that the increased labour

market engagement of women, likely stemming from the implementation of egalitarian family policies, is linked to reduced gender segregation in household tasks. On the other hand, by facilitating mothers' entry or sustained presence in the workforce, reconciliation policies contribute to dismantling patriarchal norms and cultural expectations regarding gendered labour allocation within households (Hook 2006). This aligns with evolving ideals of fatherhood, emphasising increased paternal involvement in childcare and household duties (Brandth and Kvande 1998; Wall and Arnold 2007).

The literature on fatherhood and masculinity highlights men's changing role in the within-household division of labour. Brandth and Kvande (1998, p. 294) argue that the traditional image of a good father solely focused on generating income has evolved into a "new-father image", emphasising increased participation in childcare and household duties. Wall and Arnold (2007) anticipate that childcare policies contribute to this shift by challenging traditional understandings of women's sole caregiving responsibility. Other scholars discuss paternal leave as a key factor supporting this evolution (Bünning 2015; Ciccia and Verloo 2012; Haas and Hwang 2008). Bünning (2015) demonstrates, based on panel data, that even a short paternity leave prompts fathers to increase their childcare activities. Fathers who take longer leaves, especially while their partners are working, further increase their share of housework (Bünning 2015).

Taken together, this suggests that reconciliation policies play a role in fostering more egalitarian behaviour patterns within households (Ciccia and Bleijenbergh 2014). Consequently, policies explicitly designed to promote egalitarian family models are anticipated to influence how households allocate their time, resulting in a more equitable division of labour between spouses. Moreover, it is reasonable to expect that parents in different family policy regimes allocate both paid and unpaid labour within households in accordance with the goals outlined in respective reconciliation policies (Ciccia and Bleijenbergh 2014). In essence, the varying family policy regimes are not confined to the labour market; they extend to shaping distinct lived family models.

However, critics argue that the maintenance of women in the labour market does not necessarily lead to fundamental changes in gender-specific work patterns (see, e.g., Lewis 2001). Mothers, particularly those with infants, may often find themselves in part-time positions with lower pay and limited advancement prospects, in contrast to their fully employed male partners (see, e.g., Lewis et al. 2008). While reconciliation policies have the potential to narrow the gender gap in labour market participation, they also carry the risk of intensifying gender-related labour market segregation (Korpi et al. 2013; Mandel and Semyonov 2006). Examinations of parental leave schemes across various nations, even

those instituting father quotas, reveal a persistent imbalance, with women continuing to assume a substantial portion of the total leave (Datta Gupta et al. 2008; Morgan 2009; Morgan and Zippel 2003). While this phenomenon directly impacts women's prospects in the labour market, it also underscores the enduring perception that the "responsibility for care still lies largely with women" (Morgan 2009, p. 45).

Moreover, studies indicate that the stronger integration of women into paid labour does not necessarily translate into a more egalitarian division of labour in other spheres of life. Women often continue to bear the larger share of unpaid work at home, irrespective of their labour market involvement (Lewis 2001; Nitsche and Grunow 2016; Sayer 2005). Women in high-demand careers may experience guilt due to their norm-deviant behaviour and overcompensate in household activities (Greenstein 2000), while men may reinforce traditional gender norms by avoiding unpaid work (Risman 1998). This persistent dynamic challenges the notion of a significant shift in how men allocate their time across various life spheres (see, e.g., Lewis 2001; Lewis et al. 2008). At the same time, women facing time conflicts are inclined to reduce their working hours in paid employment or leisure activities rather than diminishing their commitments to childcare and household responsibilities (Craig 2007). This resistance to reducing care time perpetuates the traditional gendered dynamics and hinders the transformation of the female care domain into a more gender-egalitarian sphere.

Although reconciliation policies may modernise the male breadwinner model, scholars argue that they might not directly lead to an egalitarian family model (see, e.g., Crompton 2001; Gornick and Meyers 2003; Lewis 2001; Oehrli et al. 2024). While policies can impact women's participation in the workforce, the division of unpaid work within a family is ultimately shaped by the underlying norms of a couple (Motiejunaite and Kravchenko 2008; Nitsche and Grunow 2016). Within this context, Nitsche and Grunow (2016) establish a distinct correlation in their examination of panel data. Their findings highlight a strong association between an egalitarian gender ideology of the partners and a more equitable distribution of housework. Notably, their findings indicate that resources do not emerge as a significant factor influencing this division. Additionally, Motiejunaite and Kravchenko (2008) show that the assumption that varying family policy contexts have consequences beyond the labour market and reflect in varying lived family models is not self-evident as the "everyday" gender contract may differ from the official one. Overall, the link between the policy regime and the within-household division of work may be more complex and additionally include group-specific differences, e.g., depend on gender-related

norms or, for example, on educational level (Berghammer 2014; Pronzato 2009; Stadelmann-Steffen 2011).

In conclusion, reconciliation policies play a pivotal role in shaping female labour market participation and the division of labour within households. While they contribute to evolving gender norms and paternal involvement, their effectiveness in fostering egalitarian family models depends on careful policy design and needs further research.

4.3 Egalitarian Families: Fathers Leading the Change from Breadwinners to Caregivers

While previous research predominantly centred on female employment (Boeckmann et al. 2015; Cascio et al. 2015; Ferragina 2019; Korpi et al. 2013; Orloff 2002; Schönberg and Ludsteck 2014), I posit that the research focus should now shift to fathers to comprehend how the transition from a universal breadwinner to caregiver role could be promoted. Although more than thirty years have passed since Fraser (1994) introduced the idea of a universal caregiver model, we are still far from witnessing the widespread adoption of such a family model. Therefore, it is increasingly crucial to outline measures that actively support its realisation. As outlined in Chapter 3, fostering a universal caregiver model is key to egalitarianism. Hence, two fundamental changes are imperative for transitioning towards this model:

1. The promotion of women's gainful employment.
2. The promotion of caregiving responsibilities for men.

Even if the universal caregiver model no longer encompasses gender-specific distinctions, the trajectory toward this model is inherently gendered, given the existing status quo. Orloff (2002, p. 41) outlines the intentional progression from the current starting point, asserting, "encouraging men's caregiving is essential, as is encouraging women's integration into paid employment while allowing their continued caregiving". It is through this gender-oriented approach that a convergence of the two sexes becomes conceivable, paving the way for the development of an egalitarian family structure. If we were to reach a future state devoid of gender specificity, policies supporting a universal caregiver model would cease to be differentiated by gender. Presently, however, the starting point is the traditional or modernised male breadwinner model upon which most welfare state systems are predicated.

Taking a comprehensive approach, it becomes evident that analysing households as a whole, considering the entire family and the dynamics between parents, is crucial. The overarching question revolves around the extent to which current family policy measures provide incentives for a universal caregiver model. While the promotion of women's employment and related policies has been extensively researched (see Section 4.1), the transition to a universal caregiver model poses greater complexity. This shift not only targets fathers but also necessitates additional policy interventions. There is limited understanding of how this transition, especially the reduction of paternal gainful employment in favour of caregiving, can be actively supported by state measures. Despite family models ultimately involving the entire household, my focus is, therefore, on fathers and their behaviour.

Historically, the universal breadwinner model was perceived as the ideal to aspire to, leading previous research to predominantly focus on women and policies influencing their behaviour (see, e.g., Boeckmann et al. 2015; Cascio et al. 2015; Ferragina 2019; Korpi et al. 2013; Schönberg and Ludsteck 2014). However, to advance the universal caregiver model, a pivotal determinant is the transformation of fathers' behaviour. Policies affecting mothers' labour participation do not significantly shift fathers from gainful employment to caregiving. Conversely, parental leave policies are believed to have noteworthy effects (Rubery 2015), differing from other policies "in the sense that they can actually attract non-carers into care" (Ciccia and Verloo 2012, p. 508). Studies indicate that, thus far, the specific design of parental leave policies stands as the sole recognised approach with the capacity to influence the amount of time fathers dedicate to caregiving (Arnalds et al. 2022; Bünning 2015; Castro-García and Pazos-Moran 2016; Dearing 2016; Meil 2013; Patnaik 2019; Ray et al. 2010; Rubery 2015). While limited research exists on this topic, some initial findings on the long-term effects of parental leave uptake by fathers are visible, albeit with contradictory findings in some cases: an increase in fathers' emotional investment and their relationship with the infant (O'Brien 2009), fathers are more engaged in childcare (Arnalds et al. 2022; Meil 2013) and in addition to childcare, housework is also shared more equally between the parents (Almqvist and Duvander 2014). Nevertheless, conflicting outcomes emerge, as Gonalons-Pons (2023) uncovers an accentuated gender-based segregation in unpaid work with the introduction of paid leave policies. This involves a more substantial rise in caregiving responsibilities for mothers compared to fathers, alongside an increase in household chores for fathers, while mothers experience no such change.

There are also different results with regard to the effects on paternal employment: Bünning (2015), next to the additional involvement in childcare, also finds

a decrease in fathers' working hours. Although Tamm (2019) confirms the long-term effects on childcare and housework, he does not find a lasting effect on fathers' working hours. In contrast, Patnaik (2019) states in her research on the effect of a so-called daddy quota[1] that "paternity leave reduces sex specialization long after the leave period" (Patnaik 2019, p. 1009). Specifically, she notes that mothers spend more time at paid work, fathers spend more time at home, as well as that fathers do more and mothers less housework compared to parents who do not benefit from such a daddy quota. She underscores the importance of specific labels such as "daddy-only" and financial compensation, as well as the critical role of the initial parenthood period, emphasising the path-dependency of parental behaviour (Patnaik 2019, p. 1013).

The birth of a child and the initial period afterwards are recognised as a critical time during which a couple must navigate new roles, and the emerging tasks and responsibilities are redistributed (Huerta et al. 2014; Schober and Zoch 2019; Tanaka and Waldfogel 2007). Since parenthood amplifies gender-specific roles and the gendered allocation of tasks within couples, leading to a significant transition in women's focus towards unpaid labour, while men's emphasis on paid work remains unchanged, this is exactly where policies have the potential to make a difference (Gonalons-Pons 2023, p. 1745). As parental leave aligns precisely with this period, it is presumed that significant potential exists for shaping how parents organise themselves and determining the lasting nature of their division of responsibilities towards greater egalitarianism.

The mechanism behind this relationship can be explained in several ways: An intense bond is formed between father and child during the leave, influencing gender and parental identity (Schober and Zoch 2019). Patnaik (2019) describes a similar identity effect for mothers, stating, "the wives of men who take leave may enjoy the experience of committing to their careers while being supported by a helpful spouse at home, and they may experience disutility from returning to traditional gender roles" (Patnaik 2019, pp. 1020). Secondly, fathers' childcare skills are known to improve during this leave period (Schober and Zoch 2019). The time devoted to caring for their children during the leave period allows fathers to cultivate and enhance their skills in nurturing and addressing their child's needs. Moreover, during the leave, parents divide specific tasks, and each parent enhances their skills in these designated areas. This specialisation makes a later change in task-sharing costly and unattractive (Patnaik 2019, p. 1020). To avoid unnecessary additional expenses, parents are more likely to stick with their established division, even after the leave has ended. On the contrary, when a

[1] Parental leave that is specifically granted to the father and is not transferable to the mother.

father remains an active part of the workforce, his role at home often assumes the position of a helper. However, opting to stay at home after childbirth and actively engaging in parenting leads to a shift in tasks and roles. As stated by Rehel (2014, p. 110): "This shift from a manager-helper dynamic to that of coparenting creates the opportunity for the development of a more gender-equitable division of labour." This observation resonates seamlessly with identity theories and a role occupancy perspective, proposing that a father's identity undergoes a transformative process while he is on leave, reflective of his newfound experiences (Schober and Scott 2012; Schober and Zoch 2019).

In conclusion, it is evident that taking parental leave has the potential to encourage fathers to become more involved in caregiving even after the leave concludes. The question at hand is how policy design can maximise this effect and enhance fathers' utilisation of leave. Research indicates that many fathers either do not use these policies at all or only partially (Jurado-Guerrero and Muñoz-Comet 2021; Reimer 2020; Rostgaard and Ejrnæs 2021; Saarikallio-Torp and Miettinen 2021). The specific designs and individual aspects of parental leave policies are central to this discussion and must be thoroughly examined (Haas and Rostgaard 2011, p. 181). Therefore, the next chapter is dedicated entirely to exploring parental leave policies.

The Design of Parental Leave Policies

5

This chapter explores the historical evolution and ongoing reforms of parental leave, with emphasis on four key aspects: duration, sharing, monetary compensation, and flexibility. Section 5.1 introduces the diverse landscape of parental leave policies and their impact on parental behaviour, culminating in a blueprint for an ideal policy that challenges traditional gender roles, addresses economic barriers, and fosters gender equality. Turning to fathers, Section 5.2 acknowledges their evolving role in child-rearing, particularly examining the impact of the duration of paternal leave on egalitarian parenting. To address the second sub-research question, hypotheses 1 and 2 are developed. Section 5.3 explores causal relationships and discusses the impact of egalitarian leave policies on fathers' time allocation. Thus, this section addresses the third sub-research question and outlines it in hypotheses. Overall, this chapter lays the groundwork for a comprehensive analysis of paternal leave policies and their impact on achieving egalitarian family dynamics. In brief, the objective is to address the question posed at the end of the previous chapter: How can policy design encourage fathers to take parental leave and play a more active role in parenting?

5.1 Parental Leave in its Essence

Parental leave refers to the period of time an employee takes off work to care for a child, typically following childbirth or adoption. Historically, parental leave policies primarily targeted mothers, providing them with a designated period for postnatal recovery and infant care. In contrast, fathers often had limited access to formal parental leave, which perpetuated traditional gender roles and hindered their involvement in caregiving responsibilities (Haas and Rostgaard 2011). While

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the expansion of leave policies and the inclusion of fathers began in the Scandinavian countries in the 1970s, continental and Southern Europe followed suit in the 1980s and 1990s with various reforms (Morgan 2009). However, these processes are not yet complete, and new reforms for greater egalitarianism continue to be implemented.

Parental leave policies are grounded in the principle that parents have the right to take time off work after the birth of their child to care for their child without risking their job. The specific structures of these policies are diverse and encompass various aspects that warrant careful study, given their wide-ranging effects on parental behaviour (Haas and Rostgaard 2011, p. 181). The configurations of parental leave can be categorised into different aspects based on various literature (see, e.g., Blum et al. 2023; Ciccia and Verloo 2012; Kaufman et al. 2020; Thévenon 2018). This facilitates a more nuanced discussion and brings structure to the various forms. The first aspect is the *duration*, determining how long the leave lasts. The second aspect involves the entitlement of individuals to the policy and the extent to which it can be divided between the parents – the *sharing* aspect. The third aspect pertains to *monetary compensation*, specifying the extent to which the loss of salary is compensated during this time off. The final aspect addresses the *flexibility* of the care period, exploring whether it can be divided or must be taken in one go. It also considers whether there are specified time frames for the care period and whether employment is permitted during this time and under what conditions. These four aspects are discussed in detail in the subsequent Subsection 5.1.1.

5.1.1 The Four Aspects of Parental Leave Configurations

In the following, the current state of research on these individual aspects is discussed. From this, I conceptualise the ideal design of parental leave measures which are subsequently empirically tested. I draw from existing research – which has traditionally concentrated on the universal breadwinner model and the behaviour of mothers – and translate its insights into the universal caregiver model and therefore including the effects of various arrangements on fathers.

Duration

Today, the landscape of parental leave spans a broad spectrum, offering varying durations ranging from no leave at all to extended periods of up to three years (Addati et al. 2014). The relationship between maternal leave duration and workforce participation reveals a curvilinear progression, with the optimal leave duration

for maximising maternal engagement in the workforce situated at a moderate duration (Ferragina 2019). Extensive studies point towards an optimal length of leave of approximately one year for mothers (Boeckmann et al. 2015). Shorter periods of leave may lead to a decline in mothers' involvement in paid employment, while longer leaves have been associated with increased gender inequality both at home and in the workplace (Schönberg and Ludsteck 2014). Domestic gender disparities increase significantly when mothers take prolonged leaves from the workforce (Gornick and Meyers 2003). Prolonged absences from the workforce may result in decreased participation in the labour force for mothers for mainly two reasons: First, prolonged leave decreases women's participation in the labour market because they loose touch with their profession and network, and second, employers anticipate such prolonged breaks and thus preemptively do not hire women, particularly if fathers are entitled to significantly shorter paternity leaves (Gloor et al. 2018).

As highlighted in the introduction (refer to Subsection 1.2.2), a noticeable research gap concerning the impact of parental leave duration on fathers exists. This gap stems from data limitations, as fathers often do not fully take-up their available leave options. A significant proportion either abstains from using their leave entitlement altogether or only utilises a fraction of it (see, e.g., Jurado-Guerrero and Muñoz-Comet 2021; Reimer 2020; Rostgaard and Ejrnæs 2021; Saarikallio-Torp and Miettinen 2021). The scarcity of data variation on leave duration poses a substantial challenge for a comprehensive analysis. Existing research on leave duration and its effects on fathers reveals the following trends: Essentially, the effects observed in numerous studies indicate that fathers who take paternity leave tend to do more unpaid work than those who do not take leave. These differences are further amplified by a longer duration of the leave period (for a more detailed exploration, see Section 5.2). However, in the categorisation of leave duration, Huerta et al. (2014), as well as Nepomnyaschy and Waldfogel (2007), group together all fathers who took leave for two weeks and longer, impeding meaningful predictions about leave durations extending to several months. Taking a closer look at the study by Haas and Hwang (2008) which examined 356 fathers in Sweden, 58% of whom took leave lasting between 2 and 212 days (with an average of 47.56 days), a pattern emerges: As the duration of leave increases, these fathers took on significantly more childcare duties. This reveals a distinct trend of increased effects with longer leave durations for Sweden. Yet, it remains to be determined whether there is a point of reversal, similar to that observed for women where the effect diminishes again, or if a plateau effect occurs. A plateau effect would imply that the impact stagnates after a certain length of leave, no longer exhibiting an increase, but also avoiding a decrease. Consequently, determining an ideal leave duration for fathers, at which the maximum effect is achieved, remains an unresolved aspect of this research.

In line with these research findings, efforts have been made to identify an optimal duration for both parents. While a sufficient length of leave is important, longer maternal leaves can reinforce traditional gender roles, potentially limiting fathers' involvement in caregiving responsibilities. Thus, the duration of parental leave emerges as a crucial factor not only in shaping individual career trajectories but also in influencing broader societal dynamics related to gender roles and equality. Striking the right balance in parental leave not only ensures maternal workforce participation but also plays a crucial role in fostering gender equality both at home and in the professional sphere. Gornick and Meyers (2008) identify a range of six to twelve months per parent for the most gender-equitable parental leave, with Kaufman et al. (2020) specifying this further and concluding that six months per parent is the ideal duration.

Sharing

In numerous countries, parental leave policies include both individually allocated, non-transferable leave shares for each parent, as well as leave entitlements that can be freely divided between parents. Despite these options, empirical evidence consistently highlights a stark pattern: The majority of such freely divisible entitlements are predominantly utilised by mothers (Castellanos-Serrano et al. 2024; Haas and Hwang 2019; Reimer 2020). Strikingly, fathers not only underutilised joint parental leave but also make limited or no use of specific time slots designated for paternal leave (Castro-García and Pazos-Moran 2016; Kaufman 2017; Saarikallio-Torp and Miettinen 2021).

Numerous factors contribute to this, encompassing financial considerations, expectations related to gender roles, resistance perceived within the work environment, and policy restrictions (Kaufman 2017, p. 310). To illustrate, in a survey experiment, Petts et al. (2022) confirm a negative association between taking leave and perceived job commitment. However, an intriguing aspect emerges regarding the labelling of these entitlements. O'Brien (2009) suggests that gender-neutral parental leave forms may be too implicit, advocating for a "more explicit labeling to legitimize paternal access to the care of infants" (O'Brien 2009, p. 199). The signalling effect of such father-specific attribution is underscored by Meil (2013, p. 568) and aligns with the perspective of Patnaik (2019), who sees a reduction in stigma costs through a distinct label, such as a "daddy quota". It sends a public signal to promote paternal involvement and, above all, for fathers themselves: "The non-transferable element sends a strong prescriptive and moral signal to fathers, because at one point the legislator decided to give men an individual entitlement to care for their new-born children, despite a long-lasting tradition of assigning care of small children to women" (Jurado-Guerrero and Muñoz-Comet 2021, p. 597). This

is reinforced by a study on the extended Norwegian paternity quota (from 6 to 10 weeks), demonstrating an immediate and significant rise in paternity leave uptake (Hart et al. 2022).

According to Patnaik (2019), the label of a father-specific quota establishes an individual right for fathers to take leave, eliminating the need for negotiation with their partners. It also "improves [their] bargaining position with employers and coworkers, who may be more" supportive when leave is explicitly designated for paternal use (Patnaik 2019, p. 1017). The significance of a father quota in encouraging paternal involvement is echoed in various studies (see also Castro-García and Pazos-Moran 2016; Haas and Rostgaard 2011).

In addition, the duration of the non-transferable leave plays a role in how parents divide the remaining transferable portion between them: In a quasi-experiment conducted in Germany, Bünning and Hipp (2022) compared two policy designs. In the first[1], parents had 12 months of parental leave, with a requirement of at least two months for each partner; otherwise, those months would expire, resulting in a total leave of 10 months. In the second scenario, partner months were twice as long, lasting four months. The results indicated that parents in the second scenario expressed a significantly stronger preference for a more equal distribution of parental leave. Consequently, an increase in partner months holds the potential to promote greater gender equality (Bünning and Hipp 2022).

In order to advance egalitarianism in families through a universal caregiver model, a non-transferable share specifically designated for fathers is crucial in the formulation of parental leave policies. The distinct labelling not only addresses societal expectations but also plays a pivotal role in overcoming practical barriers, fostering a culture that promotes and supports fathers' active involvement in parental leave.

Monetary compensation

In crafting effective parental leave policies, the provision of a post-leave job guarantee is a critical component. However, another indispensable aspect is the implementation of wage replacement, a feature that varies significantly across different countries. While some states offer no financial compensation, others not only differ in the duration of payout periods but also in the amount of the wage replacement – often, though not always, set as a percentage of the preceding salary (Addati et al. 2014). There are also variations as to whether there is a universal minimum amount that is also paid to parents who are not working, for example, i.e., who have

[1] This scenario corresponds to the current policy design implemented today in Germany.

no previous salary, and whether or how high the maximum amount paid out is, i.e., whether the amount is capped (Blum et al. 2023).

Numerous studies underscore the pivotal role that wage replacement, i.e., the amount thereof, plays in shaping fathers' utilisation of parental leave (Haas and Rostgaard 2011; Kaufman 2017; Patnaik 2019; Ray et al. 2010). In addition to normative and gender role-related factors, there is a straightforward economic rationale for this: In many families, fathers typically serve as the main provider, often working longer hours and earning higher wages (refer to Section 3.2 for further details on the gender wage gap). Consequently, economic considerations often deter fathers from opting for parental leave, as the potential wage loss is disproportionately higher for them than for mothers.

Various proposals exist for the specific amount of wage replacement. For instance, O'Brien (2009) suggests a minimum of 50% earnings for a *high income replacement*, while other researchers advocate for full wage replacement (Castro-García and Pazos-Moran 2016; Ciccia and Verloo 2012). The elimination of gender-specific deductions occurs only when the wage replacement fully reimburses the current salary (for a more in-depth discussion on full wage replacement refer to Section 9.2). The significance of full wage compensation is emphasised by Gornick and Meyers (2003) who argue that there is a direct link between gender imbalance in leave take-up and the amount of wage replacement and, moreover, that only at one hundred percent wage compensation can a couple be truly "economically agnostic" in deciding which partner takes leave (Gornick and Meyers 2003, p. 120).

However, variations exist between households in terms of parental leave uptake. Fathers from higher-income groups experience a more substantial loss of earnings compared to their counterparts in lower-income groups. Families in the latter group, however, often face no choice but to forego leave due to an inability to afford a loss of earnings. This observation aligns with the findings of Koslowski and Kadar-Satat (2019), who, in their analysis of Scottish fathers, identify economic constraints as a primary factor leading fathers to avoid taking leave, resulting in social stratification in leave uptake. Their research indicates that fathers with greater socio-economic resources are not only more inclined to take leave but also opt for longer durations of leave. This correlation resonates with the assertion that "[f]inancial constraints may thus be one restriction that prevents policies from unfolding their positive effects" by Bünning and Hipp (2022, p. 193). This, further, echoes the conclusion of the study conducted by Köppe (2023), highlighting that inadequate paternal leave benefits contribute significantly to the disparities in fathers' leave uptake, thereby exacerbating class inequalities.

Lastly, in the context of a universal caregiver model, the significance of complete continued pay cannot be overstated. Only when caregivers receive full wage compensation does their care work attain equal valuation with paid work. Any lesser percentage implies a devaluation of care work relative to paid work; for instance, a fifty percent wage compensation suggests that paid work is considered twice as valuable as care work.

In conclusion, the imperative for parental leave policies lies in the thoughtful consideration and implementation of robust wage replacement mechanisms. Addressing economic disparities and promoting an equitable valuation of care are pivotal steps toward fostering a system that not only supports families but also recognises the equal worth of caregiving responsibilities. The provision of full wage replacement becomes a cornerstone in the design of parental leave in order to build a framework that is consistent with gender equality.

Flexibility

The fourth aspect is flexibility. Implementation of this characteristic varies depending on the context (Blum et al. 2023). For instance, in some countries, parental leave must be taken all at once without any flexibility. However, in some countries, parents have the option to divide their parental leave into multiple blocks, ranging from varying numbers of blocks to individual days. For instance, in Hungary and Japan, paternal leave expires after two months from the child's birth and can be split into two parts (Blum et al. 2023, pp. 302, 345). In Portugal, however, fathers have the option to divide their leave into multiple periods, each lasting a minimum of seven days (Blum et al. 2023, p. 459). In Sweden, parental leave can even be divided into one-eighth days, as an extreme form of flexibility (Koslowski et al. 2020, p. 559). If parental leave is divided into such short periods, it is possible to combine it with part-time employment. This flexibility is specifically provided in several countries, allowing parents to stay connected to the job market while on leave. In the Netherlands, parental leave is even explicitly formulated as a right for part-time leave, while full-time entitlement requires the employer's consent (Plantenga et al. 2005, p. 48).

Although flexibility and part-time leave options are often cited as important factors (Haas 2003; Haas and Rostgaard 2011; Plantenga et al. 2005; Weldon-Johns 2011), there is little empirical evidence on this issue. Recently, a link between part-time parental leave and life satisfaction has been established in the Dutch model (Dillenseger et al. 2023). Flexibility is also discussed as a means of making parental leave more accessible and useful for parents (Craigs 1995; Weldon-Johns 2011). Accordingly, very restrictive practices, such as those in Switzerland regarding maternity leave, have been criticised (Steiger-Sackmann 2022). Currently, Swiss women

are unable to pursue gainful employment while on leave, as any remaining leave is forfeited as soon as they engage in any paid work.

While research is inconclusive on the benefits of flexibility, Haas and Rostgaard (2011, p. 187) describe it as an incentive that can encourage fathers to take parental leave. This is because flexibility allows fathers to meet the needs of their employer, making it easier to negotiate the uptake of leave (Haas and Rostgaard 2011, pp. 187, 193).

5.1.2 Blueprint for Equality: The Ideal Parental Leave Policy

In essence, a comprehensive examination of existing literature underscores the significance of specific conditions in shaping an effective and egalitarian parental leave policy, particularly concerning fathers' participation. Although flexibility is undoubtedly important, the focus, consistent with other literature reviews, should primarily be on implementing two pivotal conditions that can significantly impact fathers' uptake of parental leave and are thus essential for an egalitarian leave policy: (1) a non-transferable period for fathers and (2) financial compensation replacing a substantial portion of wages (Castro-García and Pazos-Moran 2016; Ciccia and Verloo 2012; Gornick and Meyers 2003; Kaufman et al. 2020; O'Brien 2009; Patnaik 2019; Ray et al. 2010; Rostgaard and Ejrnæs 2021). Karu and Tremblay (2017) underscore the significance of a combination of fathers' quotas and high benefit levels to incentivise the uptake of parental leave by fathers, as do Jurado-Guerrero and Muñoz-Comet (2021).

The first critical condition is the establishment of a non-transferable period exclusively designated for fathers. This implies a deliberate and unequivocal allocation of leave that cannot be shared or transferred to the mother. By delineating a specific time frame earmarked for paternal leave, policymakers signal a commitment to encouraging fathers' active involvement in caregiving responsibilities. This non-transferable period not only challenges traditional gender roles but also fosters an environment where both parents are recognised as equally responsible for childcare.

The second indispensable condition revolves around financial compensation, aiming to replace a substantial portion of fathers' wages during their leave. Financial stability is a fundamental factor influencing individuals' decisions to take time off work, especially for fathers who still today often are the main breadwinner of the family. To truly incentivise fathers to participate in caregiving without

the burden of economic strain, it is imperative to provide meaningful financial support. Ensuring that a significant part of the father's income is replaced during the leave period, policymakers can mitigate potential financial barriers, making it a more feasible and attractive option for fathers to actively engage in parenting responsibilities.

Together, these two conditions form the cornerstone of a successful and egalitarian parental leave policy. The non-transferable period challenges traditional norms and promotes shared responsibility, while financial compensation addresses economic concerns, making paternal leave a viable choice for fathers. Policymakers, by incorporating these principles into their leave policies, are expected to contribute substantially to reducing gender stereotypes, fostering a more balanced distribution of caregiving responsibilities, and promoting a culture of true gender equality both within the home and the workplace.

An egalitarian starting point set by the implementation of such a family policy would not only provide incentives for fathers, but would also strengthen egalitarian gender norms in general, benefiting mothers as well. Finally, to promote a universal caregiver family model, it is necessary to involve both parents and strengthen them together in an egalitarian division of labour. As Schober and Zoch (2019) put it, the ultimate goal is a specific policy design to prevent long maternity leave over several years and encourage the take-up of caregiver leave by fathers. According to Castellanos-Serrano et al. (2024), the three pivotal factors for the design of parental leave schemes are "fully paid, non-transferable, and equal for men and women" (Castellanos-Serrano et al. 2024, p. 376). In line with their recommendations, I further complement their proposal with flexibility for an optimal gender-equitable starting point. I assert that an ideal policy should ensure parental leave that meets the following criteria:

- **Duration:** Lasting between six and twelve months.
- **Compensation:** Providing one hundred percent of the taker's regular wage.
- **Flexibility:** Allowing flexible usage, either on a full-time basis or in combination with part-time employment.
- **Sharing:** Extending this form of leave to each parent without transferability.

Delving into the practical implications of an egalitarian parental leave policy prompts a more specific inquiry: How can such a policy be structured to maximise egalitarianism? Is there a measurable standard for assessing egalitarianism in parental leave policies? These questions not only entail theoretical considerations but also require a pragmatic assessment of the existing landscape. Does the ideal parental leave, embodying true egalitarian principles, exist in practice? To what extent do current parental leave policies incorporate incentives for

fathers to actively engage in caregiving responsibilities? While various attempts have been made to assess parental leave policies for their level of egalitarianism (Castro-García and Pazos-Moran 2016; Dearing 2016; Koslowski 2021; Ray et al. 2010), existing findings often rely on outdated data, lacking insights into recent developments. Recent years have witnessed significant reforms in parental leave policies, especially those targeting fathers. Thus, a nuanced, case-specific assessment becomes imperative to comprehend the incentives generated by contemporary policies.

The theoretical ideal of a universal caregiver model, posited by Fraser (1994), serves as a benchmark for egalitarian aspirations. Yet, Ciccia and Verloo (2012, p. 520) suggests that it remains more of an ideal concept within equality policy, given the absence of a practical example of such a model to date. This necessitates a critical examination of whether the label "utopia" is still applicable in the context of the latest developments. To address this and therefore also the research question from the Introduction Subsection 1.2.1 *How should a parental leave policy be designed to achieve maximal egalitarianism?*, in Chapter 7, an analysis grid is developed to provide a structured means of measuring the effectiveness of leave policies. Subsequently, this analysis grid is applied in Chapter 9 to scrutinise current parental leave policies in a thorough and systematic manner. Through this analytical lens, the quest for understanding the real-world impact of parental leave policies, particularly in incentivising fathers, takes on a more nuanced and informed perspective.

5.2 Fathers on Paternal Leave

Following the theoretical derivation of an ideal leave to promote egalitarianism for both parents, this section will narrow its focus to fathers. It will address the second sub-research question and provide clarification on related assumptions. Hypotheses will then be developed to explore the relationship between the duration of leave and the distribution of unpaid work between parents.

5.2.1 Paternal Leave Duration and Egalitarian Parenting

The active participation of fathers in parenting is increasingly acknowledged as beneficial for both children's well-being and the promotion of gender equality (Cabrera et al. 2007; Sarkadi et al. 2008). Several studies have observed a favourable connection between fathers opting for parental leave and an increase

in their extended childcare hours (Almqvist and Duvander 2014; Bünning 2015; Meil 2013; Patnaik 2019; Tamm 2019). Additionally, there are indications in the research suggesting more pronounced effects on fathers' childcare involvement with extended paternal leave durations (Fernández-Cornejo et al. 2016; Haas and Hwang 2008; Huerta et al. 2014; Nepomnyaschy and Waldfogel 2007). However, the extent of the association between the duration of paternal leave uptake and the subsequent long-term division of caregiving responsibilities between parents remains largely unclear. A thorough examination of both the duration of leave and the allocation of caregiving responsibilities within the household is suggested and aligns with the research question *Does a correlation exist between the length of parental leave taken by fathers upon the birth of their first child and the egalitarianism of the long-term distribution of caregiving responsibilities among parents?* presented in the Introduction (see Subsection 1.2.2).

The impact of paternal leave on fathers' involvement in caregiving and household responsibilities is particularly pronounced when the duration of paternal leave is sufficient to acquire new skills, facilitates adaptation to new roles, fosters identity development, and establishes patterns for the division of tasks. Supporting this perspective, Huerta et al. (2014) identify indications that not only the mere presence of leave but also its duration plays a significant role. In their comparison across four OECD countries, distinctions based on leave lengths – less than one week, one week, and two weeks or more – reveal more substantial and significant effects for longer leave duration. Similar findings are reported by the work of Nepomnyaschy and Waldfogel (2007), which categorises leave duration into two periods – less than two weeks and two weeks or more – revealing distinctions based on the duration of paternity leave. Accordingly, Haas and Hwang (2008) also confirm in their study that fathers take on more childcare tasks the longer the leave they have previously taken. This aligns with the outcomes observed by Fernández- Cornejo et al. (2016), who can affirm their hypothesis "Taking longer childbirth leave favours greater subsequent involvement of the father in childcare". Despite their nuanced approach in measuring the duration of leave uptake by day, their analysis falls short in providing comprehensive insights into the temporal commitment to unpaid labour, i.e., they do not address who invests how much time in care in detail. Their measurement involves determining which parent predominantly engages in diverse childcare activities (using a 5-point scale ranging from "mostly" the mother to "mostly" the father). Nevertheless, the information provided by the parents regarding the nuances of terms such as "mostly" is subject to individual interpretation, thereby introducing a degree of ambiguity into their findings. Finally, their analysis is limited to Spain, which leaves the transferability to other policy contexts unanswered.

Thus, drawing from the insights of this research, it is hypothesised that fathers who opt for an extended leave duration are likely to foster deeper connections with their children. This prolonged leave period provides them with the opportunity to gain increased confidence in handling caregiving tasks, facilitating a more profound engagement in their children's lives. Additionally, an extended leave duration enables fathers to actively contribute to household chores, fostering a sense of shared responsibility. However, the extent to which this increased involvement can be measured in terms of the actual time invested in unpaid work remains an open question. Consequently, it is unanswered if this multifaceted involvement contributes to a more egalitarian distribution of unpaid work within the familial context. The assumption emerges that the extended leave not only enhances the father-child relationship but also plays a pivotal role in dismantling traditional gender roles by promoting a more balanced sharing of caregiving and domestic responsibilities between parents. Therefore, the first hypothesis is formulated as follows:

H1: A more extended period of fathers' parental leave uptake is positively associated with a more egalitarian distribution of unpaid work within households.

5.2.2 The Impact of Family Policy Regimes on Paternal Leave

As previously discussed in the introduction (see Subsection 1.1.5), it is essential to acknowledge that variations are anticipated depending on the family policy regime. The specific country and its policies are expected to be pivotal factors in shaping the dynamics within households, i.e., in shaping the impact of paternal leave on the distribution of unpaid work among parents. Generous and highly developed family policies, especially those incorporating egalitarian parental leave and offering extensive paternity leave options, are associated with fostering more egalitarian household structures (Lütolf and Stadelmann-Steffen 2023).

As such, the family policy regime plays a dual role in influencing the allocation of unpaid work within households: Firstly, the policy framework directly shapes the potential effects of paternal leave, as fathers' choices and opportunities differ significantly based on the available parental leave policies in a given country (see, e.g., Blum et al. 2023; Ciccia and Verloo 2012). Secondly, the policy regime exerts an indirect influence, contributing to the shaping of societal norms

regarding gender roles (see, e.g., Farré et al. 2023; Petts et al. 2022; Philipp et al. 2023). The broader policy effect on conceptions of equality and gender roles is presumed to have an overarching impact beyond individual circumstances and specific leave uptake. Recognising and understanding these contextual nuances is crucial for a comprehensive analysis of the impact of paternal leave on the distribution of unpaid labour within households. Hence, the second hypothesis can be formulated as follows:

H2: A generous policy regime, particularly through egalitarian parental leave policies or substantial paternity leave, correlates with a more egalitarian distribution of unpaid work within households.

5.3 The Policy Potential of Paternal Leave on Egalitarian Family Dynamics

Lastly, I tackle the third specified research question on the potential of leave policies to induce an alteration in the allocation of time to paid and unpaid work by fathers. The problem of endogeneity is a recurring theme in family policy research, and with it the question of causality (Lütolf and Stadelmann-Steffen 2023; Olivetti and Petrongolo 2017). Several attempts have been made to address this issue. In particular, the natural experiments discussed earlier, such as studies of policy changes in Quebec, Canada (Patnaik 2019; Wray 2020), provide strong evidence that parental leave policies affect fathers' behaviour and thus suggest an effect mechanism in this direction. However, as such studies analyse one specific policy reform at a time, they are necessarily limited to one country and one policy context, which means that generalisations to other regimes remain difficult to apply.

Drawing on the theory and research presented in the preceding chapters, a parental leave policy that promotes an egalitarian division of work within the family should incorporate specific provisions for fathers. These provisions should be of sufficient length, offer adequate remuneration, and be flexible. In other words, a comprehensive and well-developed leave policy, hereafter referred to as *generous leave*, is required. Based on the results of Patnaik (2019) and Wray (2020) and their conclusions about the direction of causality, on the one hand, and the preceding discussion about *generous leave*, on the other hand, I formulate the following hypothesis:

H3: *Generous leave* leads to a reduction in fathers' employment hours and an increase in unpaid care and domestic work hours.

Financial compensation during parental leave is essential because of deeply ingrained gender norms that consider fathers as the primary breadwinners and the fact that men still earn more on average than women, making them the main provider in many families. Significant policy effects can therefore be expected, particularly regarding wage replacement, and the following specification and development of hypothesis 3 emerges:

H3a: The level of wage replacement is the policy attribute that most significantly influences fathers' behaviour, with a high level of wage replacement increasing fathers' care time at the expense of employment.

The issue of contextual influence also arises in the discussion of causal relationships. As previously discussed in Subsection 5.2.2 and summarised in hypothesis 2, it is assumed that the broader family policy context, specifically the family policy regime, has an impact on the individual division of labour. Fathers living in an well-developed family policy system that encourages egalitarian family arrangements may be less responsive to policy changes as their outlook is already more egalitarian. Conversely, fathers in a regime with less developed family policies are more likely to reduce their working hours and increase their caring hours if they have access to generous parental leave. This policy would provide them with real opportunities that differ from the current situation. This leads to the following hypothesis:

H4: The elasticity of fathers towards egalitarian family models depends on the family policy regime of the respective country.

Part III
Research Design

Case Selection

6

As discussed in the Introduction 1.1.5, it is important to consider a specific family policy and its potential impact within the broader welfare state, particularly the family policy regime. Therefore, this chapter begins by briefly discussing the importance of context and providing a broad classification of different family policy regimes. It then presents the case selection in Section 6.2, followed by a description of the family policies of these five countries and their unique characteristics individually.

6.1 Comparative Perspective on Family Policy Regimes

Current research highlights the varying effects of reconciliation policies resulting from different policy designs and contexts. Policy measures vary in their objectives and capacities to alter work and family relations depending on their design (Olivetti and Petrongolo 2017). However, their impact also depends on the wider policy context in which they operate. This has been demonstrated in various studies (see, e.g., Boeckmann et al. 2015; Budig et al. 2012; Ciccia and Bleijenbergh 2014; Cooke 2011; Daly and Ferragina 2018; Gangl and Ziefle 2015; Meyers et al. 1999; Pfau-Effinger 2005; Vuri 2016).

Since social policies in Western democracies originate from supporting the male breadwinner model (Lewis 1992), attempts to classify country-specific reconciliation strategies use this traditional model as a conceptual starting point. The general assumption is that Western democracies have been moving away from supporting the male breadwinner model, although they have done so in different ways and to varying degrees (von Gleichen and Seeleib-Kaiser 2018). The advent of post-industrialisation has presented a significant challenge to this

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societal structure, as it assumed universal adult participation in the labour market and shaped policies accordingly (Fleckenstein 2011; Lewis 2001). The Nordic welfare states were pioneers in shifting away from the male breadwinner model by implementing social policies that endorsed dual-earner families and facilitated employment opportunities for women in the public sector, a paradigm shift often linked to the combination of social democracy and organised women's movements in Northern Europe (Fleckenstein 2011; Korpi 2000; Korpi et al. 2013; Orloff 2006). While there was no comparable policy expansion in the liberal welfare states, in the United States, for example, anti-discrimination laws or tax policies simplified women's participation in the labour market, but also the fact that immigration combined with labour market policies made cheap labour available, which facilitated the outsourcing of childcare and housework (Orloff 2006, pp. 234–235). In conservative welfare states, the shift away from the traditional male breadwinner model can be seen in its modernised version with a one-and-a-half breadwinner model accompanied by a rather moderate policy expansion, which can be observed, for example, in the important role that grandparents play as a childcare resource in the absence of alternatives (Lewis et al. 2008).

Several authors have discussed the normative ideals that underlie different strategies for reconciliation, as well as the resulting policy configurations and combinations (see, e.g., Ferragina 2019; Gornick and Meyers 2003; Lewis 2001; Olivetti and Petrongolo 2017). The country-level case selection is based on a review of various typologies of family policy regimes from previous research (see, e.g., Boje and Ejrnœs 2011; Ciccia and Verloo 2012; Crompton 2001; Fraser 1994; Gornick and Meyers 2003; Leitner 2003; Lewis 1992, 2001; Misra et al. 2007; Orloff 1993; Sainsbury 1996). It is important to note that these typologies do not align entirely with the conventional welfare state literature, which distinguishes between social democratic, conservative, and liberal welfare regimes. As discussed in Subsection 1.1.5, some scholars argue that this typology neglects gender and household aspects and requires further specification when examining gender relations (Mazur 2002; Pfau-Effinger 2000; Sainsbury 1994b).

Despite adjustments made to social security systems in industrialised countries to accommodate the rise in women's labour market participation, gender-related issues persist, mainly related to the reconciliation of paid work and caregiving responsibilities, which are addressed unevenly by welfare states (Orloff 2002, p. 40). It is important to consider these differences in social security systems and how they address the issue of reconciliation when selecting cases. The objective is to select countries that exemplify specific family policy regimes, characterised by a unique combination of policies and associated reconciliation strategies.

Therefore, it is crucial that the case selection encompasses various welfare states within Western democracies, including diverse family policy regimes that endorse different family models. This inclusion of different policy settings allows for a more differentiated analysis of their relevance in shaping the impact of specific family policies on the division of work within households. The next section provides a detailed description of the selected countries and their family policies, as well as the characteristics of their respective family policy regimes.

6.2 Country Selection

By selecting the following five countries, a wide range of family policy regimes are encompassed. These range from the traditionally liberal stance observed in the United States (Bariola and Collins 2021) to Switzerland's liberal-conservative family policies (Häusermann and Bürgisser 2022). Germany, with a historically conservative background, has recently undergone reforms in its family policies (Schober and Zoch 2019). The social democratic Scandinavian countries, known for their generous family policies, exhibit distinct features, with Finland's emphasis on family care (Datta Gupta et al. 2008) and Sweden's focus on universal employment (Hiilamo and Kangas 2009).[1]

Switzerland
Switzerland's family policy expansion is strongly determined by the country's political context, which is characterised by direct democracy, strong federalism, and subsidiarity (Valarino 2020). There is no uniform family policy observable and must be prescribed in various policy sub-fields with correspondingly different aims and measures, combined with the problem of the distribution of responsibilities. In this intricate network of objectives, conflicting interests, and distribution of competencies, a somewhat paradoxical image of policy development in Switzerland arises: Although there have been far-reaching reforms in recent decades, state spending on family policy remains low in international comparison and the high net costs of supplementary childcare lead to a strong income based stratification in its use (Häusermann and Bürgisser 2022).

[1] In order to discuss the individual countries in detail, the number of cases was intentionally limited. For instance, Southern European countries, such as Italy or Spain, were omitted due to their 'familialist' welfare systems, which emphasize traditional family roles. Including these countries would have introduced a degree of political and cultural complexity that goes beyond the primary focus on liberal, conservative, social democratic, and hybrid family policy models analysed in this study.

Reconciling work and family life can be particularly challenging in international comparison due to the deeply ingrained traditional male breadwinner norm in society and policy, which assumes this family model (Bonoli 2013, p. 38; Combet and Oesch 2019, p. 335). The persistence of traditional gender roles in Switzerland resembles the conservative family model, where the father is employed full-time and the mother either stays at home or works part-time (Oesch 2022). However, unlike conservative welfare states, Swiss family policies remain limited. This is demonstrated by the absence of parental leave and limited leave options for both mothers and, only recently, fathers (Koslowski et al. 2022; Lanfranconi and Valarino 2014). Additionally, the cost of childcare – which is no national competence – is high (Bornatici et al. 2020) and coverage rates for young children are low (Bonoli 2013, p. 38). In combination with limited public expenditures and modest policies, Switzerland's reconciliation strategy presents itself as a hybrid, a liberal-conservative family policy regime (Häusermann and Bürgisser 2022).

Germany

Traditionally, Germany is classified as a conservative welfare state, reflected in its institutions promoting family policy focusing on maternal care (Zoch and Heyne 2023).[2] Reforms in the 1970s and 1980s led to modernisation, but not a departure from the male breadwinner model, but a modification as "the gendered division of paid and unpaid work continued to inform social policy-making" (Fleckenstein 2011, p. 550). So for decades, the prevailing approach in Germany was to encourage households with a parent staying at home, while welfare policies supported the traditional one-income model, typically with the father as the breadwinner, and emphasised the mother's role as a caregiver and offered incentives for married women to work fewer hours (Aisenbrey and Fasang 2017, p. 1453).

More recently, however, there has been a shift towards increasing support for dual-earner arrangements, driven in part by government investments in early-age childcare, although regional disparities in childcare availability persist (Bünning and Hipp 2022). Additionally, the implementation of a paid, egalitarian and generous parental leave marked the departure from the traditionally conservative welfare state with a strong male breadwinner model at policy level (Fleckenstein

[2] However, it is important to consider the historical development of Germany after the Second World War. The following remarks on the development prior to reunification primarily concern West Germany. The division of Germany prior to reunification in 1989/1990 had a significant impact on the institutional framework of family policies and labour markets, resulting in shorter interruptions and higher full-time employment rates for East German mothers compared to their West German counterparts (Zoch and Heyne 2023).

2011, pp. 543–545). These reforms transformed Germany's reconciliation strategy significantly: "Especially the most recent reforms provide financial incentives and normative anchors for increased paternal involvement and maternal employment, including shorter interruptions and increased working hours upon mothers' labor market return" (Zoch and Heyne 2023, p. 1074). However, this policy change is not yet fully reflected in society, where the traditional model is deeply embedded, reflected in gender-specific patterns of parental leave uptake, with fathers making little use of the policy (Koslowski et al. 2022).

Finland

Although the policy goal of promoting gender equality in childcare and paid work applies in Finland, clear gender differences are still evident in the case of unpaid work, despite the fact that there are comparatively high numbers of (full-time) employed mothers (Otonkorpi-Lehtoranta et al. 2022). Finland offers long and well-paid parental leaves, with a reform implemented in 2022 to expand parental entitlements and make them more gender-neutral, abolishing previously existing paternity leave and introducing high shares of non-transferable leave (Blum et al. 2023). In addition to extended parental leave, every child is entitled to daycare (Hiilamo and Kangas 2009). At first glance, Finland thus presents itself as a typical example of a social democratic regime. Although universal childcare provision in Finland is comparable to that of other Scandinavian countries, its usage is much lower than in other Nordic countries and is more similar to that of conservative countries like Germany (Krapf 2014). One of the reasons for the low use of childcare services is "the introduction of a home care allowance in the 1980s" (Krapf 2014, p. 29), a benefit after parental leave for parents who do not make use of childcare services. During the debate over the introduction, proponents stressed the freedom to choose between parental or external care, while opponents argued that it would lead to a restriction and confine mothers to their traditional role at home (Hiilamo and Kangas 2009). Indeed, around 90% of all families now make use of the home care allowance, resulting in the mother primarily staying at home (Österbacka and Räsänen 2022, p. 1075). Proponents, however, viewed this allowance as a recognition of the value of care work at home, a value that "the public authorities should recognise" (Hiilamo and Kangas 2009, p. 463), which aligns with the promotion of a caregiver parity family model.

In conclusion, although the Finnish reconciliation strategy supports a universal breadwinner model, like other Scandinavian countries, with its "more family-oriented" (Hiilamo and Kangas 2009, p. 470) framing, the male breadwinner model is also promoted, "giving parents the freedom to choose the arrangement they prefer" (Krapf 2014, p. 30). Like Switzerland, Finland thus positions itself

between different reconciliation strategies and can be classified as a hybrid – a conservative-social-democratic family policy regime (Österbacka and Räsänen 2022).

Sweden

Gender equality in family policy is a priority throughout Scandinavia, with Sweden being the most developed example (Aidukaite and Telisauskaite-Cekanavice 2020; Haas and Rostgaard 2011; Hakovirta and Eydal 2020). For instance, Swedish fathers were the first to have the option of paid parental leave as early as 1974 (Aidukaite and Telisauskaite-Cekanavice 2020; Duvander and Viklund 2019). Policy makers have increasingly focused on promoting paternal involvement in childcare through various reforms, with the introduction of the father quota in 1995 being an important milestone, which led to a significant increase in fathers' leave uptake (Larsson and Björk 2017; Nygård and Duvander 2021). Today, the parental leave policy has been expanded significantly, offering a gender-equal and generously compensated package (Blum et al. 2023). Sweden is often considered a prototype for a social democratic regime due to its greatly expanded family policy services (Aidukaite and Telisauskaite-Cekanavice 2020; Collins 2020). In addition to generous parental leave, Sweden offers a comprehensive range of childcare services. Childcare is affordable and of high quality (Krapf 2014; Larsson and Björk 2017; Motiejunaite and Kravchenko 2008). Every child over one year old who is not yet of school age is entitled to a place in childcare – representing universal childcare (Aidukaite and Telisauskaite-Cekanavice 2020; Nygård and Duvander 2021). Sweden's childcare policy aligns with the concept of defamilialisation (Aidukaite and Telisauskaite-Cekanavice 2020). The state acknowledges parents' right to childcare time to a limited extent and takes responsibility for childcare, which is reflected in comparatively high childcare enrolment rates (Krapf 2014). Mothers who are fully engaged in the labour market resemble the Swedish norm and correspond to dual-earner families (Collins 2020; Krapf 2014).

In summary, Sweden's reconciliation strategy distinguishes itself through significant public investments in external childcare services and generous parental leave systems, emphasising the promotion of labour market participation for both mothers and fathers (Ferragina 2019). This presents the Swedish family policy regime as promoting the universal breadwinner family model.

The United States

The United States are generally considered to have a limited welfare state and are classified as a liberal prototype, with an emphasis on individual responsibility and market-based solutions for reconciliation (Gornick and Meyers 2008;

Korpi et al. 2013). Typically, liberal states show limited intervention in family life and encourage employment for all, including both parents (Bariola and Collins 2021). As a result of the women's movement, there are strong anti-discrimination laws and employment equality policies that emphasise the promotion of women's participation in the labour market (Ferragina 2019; Orloff 2006).

The family policy regime of the United States is market-oriented due to the absence of strong state intervention, leaving the market as the primary institution for regulating resources (Korpi et al. 2013). Notably, the United States are the only OECD country without a nationwide paid parental leave policy (Blum et al. 2023; Musick et al. 2020). The policy most similar to parental leave in the United States is the Family and Medical Leave Act (FMLA), which provides 12 weeks of unpaid, job-protected leave, but not all employees are eligible for this benefit due to certain requirements (Koslowski et al. 2022). The United States show the "lowest level of national spending for family policy among OECD countries" (Ferragina 2020, p. 1036). Limited financial aid is available for families living in poverty, providing only a basic safety net for the most disadvantaged households (Musick et al. 2020, p. 644).

Furthermore, the United States have one of the least developed public childcare systems among industrialised nations (Gornick and Meyers 2008, p. 338). Due to the lack of public support for caregiving, families are often forced to rely on private resources, which can be both time-consuming and costly (Ferragina 2019; Musick et al. 2020, p. 643). Bariola and Collins (2021, p. 1684) describe the United States as having the "most radical" liberal welfare system and being "unique" in the sense, that it is the only OECD country lacking any national policy supporting parents in their reconciliation of work and family. Despite the fact that many mothers work full-time and that childcare is being commodified by outsourcing it from the home to the market, a closer look reveals certain gender inequalities and, above all, differences according to social class (Gornick and Meyers 2008). Lower-educated and poorer mothers are often unable to enter the labour market due to the lack of state-provided childcare solutions, while women with greater socio-economic resources can afford private childcare options such as nannies and therefore participate in the labour market (Kowalewska and Vitali 2021).

Considering these socio-economic differences, women are often perceived as workers within the welfare state system of the United States. In the absence of government assistance for care responsibilities, market-based solutions are necessary. The reconciliation strategy of the United States, therefore, promotes "a universal breadwinner welfare state with restricted government intervention" (Aisenbrey and Fasang 2017, p. 1450).

The detailed country descriptions given above can be summarised as follows: Sweden, Germany, and the United States embody traditional forms of welfare regimes, corresponding to social democratic, conservative, and liberal welfare models, respectively. Finland and Switzerland, on the other hand, exhibit hybrid characteristics. Finland positions itself between Sweden and Germany, with certain policy areas aligning with the Scandinavian model, while others, such as public childcare, are less developed, promoting care within the home (Hiilamo and Kangas 2009). Ciccia (2017) classifies European countries' reconciliation policies using fuzzy-set ideal type analysis, considering parental leave and childcare policies. In her analysis, Finland and Sweden are both hybrid types, falling under the *limited universal caregiver* category. However, Finland also aligns with the *caregiver parity type*, while Sweden aligns with the *supported universal breadwinner type*. This underscores the distinction: Finland supports childcare within the family, while Sweden emphasises egalitarian breadwinning, prioritising outsourced childcare institutions.

Switzerland, sharing comparable traditional attitudes and gender norms with Germany, can be considered a hybrid of Germany and the United States, with its liberal family policy characteristics stemming from limited state intervention and spending (Häusermann and Zollinger 2014). So, all in all, the five countries represent a broad spectrum of family policy regimes within Western democracies.

7 Analysis Grid to Measure Egalitarianism of Parental Leave Policies

In a first step, a more qualitative approach will analyse the independent variable, i.e., the different design options for parental leave, in greater depth.[1] This will address the first sub-research question from the Subsection 1.2.1 in the introduction: *How should a parental leave policy be designed to achieve maximal egalitarianism?* In the following section, an analysis grid will be created based on Section 5.1 to record parental leave policies and their level of egalitarianism. Section 7.2 introduces two policy indices: the *policy ideal index* and the *policy implementation index*. In Chapter 9, this grid will be used to analyse the policies of the five selected countries. The purpose is to gain a comprehensive understanding of the policies in place in each country, which will then inform the subsequent analyses and results.

7.1 Creating an Index to Operationalise Parental Leave Policies

To measure the egalitarianism of parental leave policies and the extent to which they promote the universal caregiver family model an index is created – the *policy index*. There are a number of indicators and formulae that are necessary for the

[1] The methods and results presented in this chapter are grounded in a theoretical framework analogous to that published in a separate article: Lütolf 2024. However, it should be noted that the analytical framework employed in the former is a further development of the framework presented in this book, adapted to apply it to a larger number of countries. In order to accommodate this broader scope, the framework in the article is simplified and less informative. While the article applies the framework to a larger number of countries, the differences in scope are significant: the analysis in this chapter provides far greater depth and insight into the specific five countries discussed here.

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calculation of this index. The main formula is:

$$policy\ index = \frac{leave\ mother + leave\ father}{2} - \frac{leave\ mother}{leave\ father} + gender\ quotient$$

wherein the mother's and the father's leave indicators (named *leave mother* and *leave father* in the main formula) are calculated as follows:

$$leave\ parent = duration + wage\ rep. + adjusted\ duration \cdot 2 + flexibility$$

and the following equation produces the gender quotient:

$$gender\ quotient = \frac{non\text{-}transferable\ share\ for\ fathers}{non\text{-}transferable\ share\ for\ mothers}$$

As discussed in Section 4.3, the current status quo means that the path to a universal caregiver model is gendered. Moreover, mothers and fathers have access to different leave policies. Therefore, it is essential to distinguish between the effects policies produce on mothers and the impact they have on fathers. This is done by using the aforementioned leave indicator for each parent. These indicators incorporate the policy's duration, wage replacement, and flexibility (Table 7.1 presents the values of these items). Leave duration and wage replacement influence each other. For example, an extensive leave that is hardly compensated or not compensated at all is not very logical because the lack of compensation dissuades many parents from using it, not least because many families cannot afford to do so. The measures of parental leave account for such scenarios through an additional component. Like a *full-time equivalent*, the length of parental leave is calculated with one hundred percent wage replacement – the *full wage-adjusted duration* or short *adjusted duration* (see Table 7.1, and for the conversion values of the exemplified countries see Table 9.3). The total paid compensation remains at the same level as before. Including this fourth index in the calculation of the parental leave indicator has the additional advantage of assigning greater weight to the leave's duration and financial compensation than to its flexibility. Flexibility is a vital policy element; however, the duration of mothers' leave and the wage replacement that parents, especially fathers, receive are generally considered more important, so both aspects should be given twice as much weight. To do so and to assign sufficient weight to the interaction between duration and wage replacement, the *adjusted duration* is doubled.

Table 7.1 Value assignments per policy aspect

Policy aspects	1 point	0.5 point	0 point
Duration	6–12 months	3 months / 15months	none / ≥ 18 months
Wage rep.	100%	50%	none
adj. Duration	≥ 6 months	3 months	none
Flexibility	split AND part time	split OR part time	all at once

Note: For all policy aspects with the exception of flexibility, any value between 0 and 1 is possible (the specific value assignment is shown in Figures 7.1, 7.2, and 7.3).
Source: Prepared by the author.

How the individual components of the formula receive their specific values is demonstrated in the following figures: Figure 7.1 shows how duration is calculated, Figure 7.2 does the same for wage replacement, and Figure 7.3 shows the scores for adjusted duration. As far as flexibility is concerned, the possibility of taking single days off is an option for part-time work, because parents can combine the latter with parental leave in any given week.

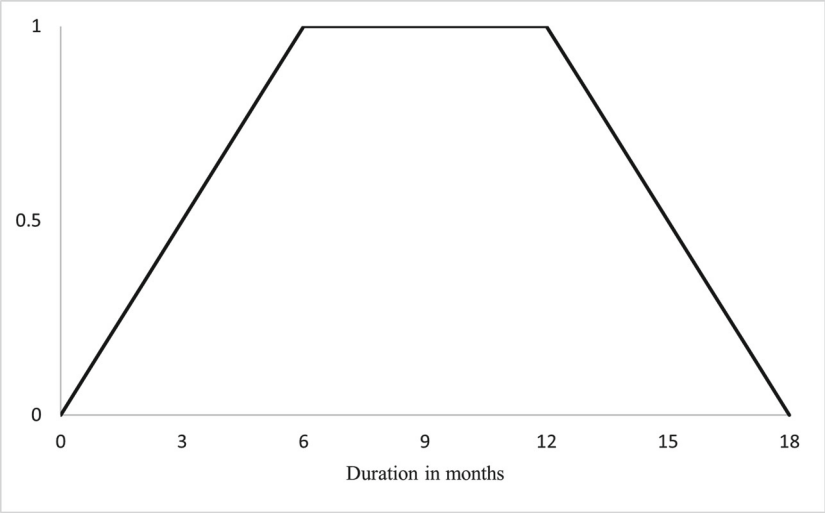

Figure 7.1 Value assignment for the duration of leave. (Source: Prepared by the author.)

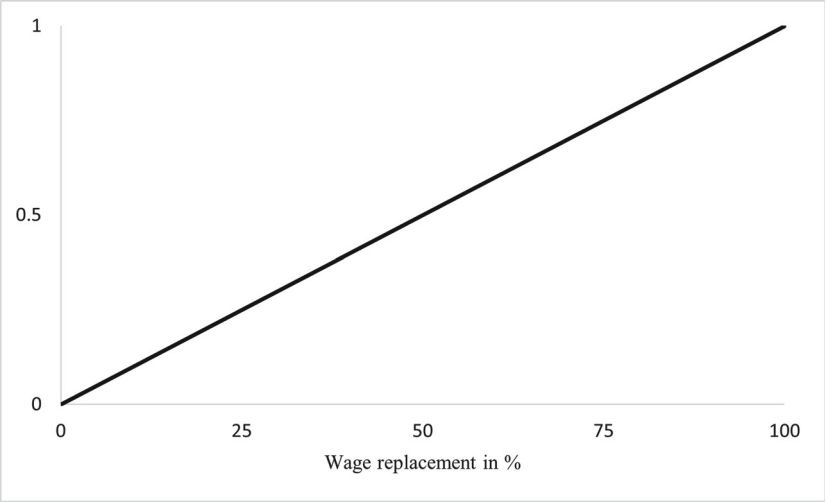

Figure 7.2 Value assignment for the wage replacement. (Source: Prepared by the author.)

Figure 7.3 Value assignment for the full wage adjusted duration. (Source: Prepared by the author.)

The main formula of the *policy index* is calculated by taking the average of the two parents' leave indicators. The quotient of the two indicators serves to operationalise sharing, i.e., the allocation of leave between the parents. Subtracting this *leave indicator quotient* from the aforementioned average means that the fewer points a policy receives, the more significant the difference between the parents is and the less the policy covers fathers vis-à-vis mothers. Specifically, a change in fathers' time allocation is central to moving toward a universal caregiver model. Therefore, their relative leave opportunities are crucial, and the *leave indicator quotient* must factor strongly into the formula.

The main formula's third and final component is the gender quotient, which is derived by dividing the duration of fathers' non-transferable leave by the duration of mothers' non-transferable leave. Its addition to the equation deducts points if the policy disadvantages fathers vis-à-vis mothers, which allows to account for the recent finding that the promotion of the universal caregiver model strongly depends on the daddy quota and a share specifically reserved for fathers. As empirical evidence has shown, a fixed proportion exclusively allotted to fathers is essential to ensure that they use it (Haas and Rostgaard 2011; O'Brien 2009). One of the most recent studies on daddy quotas examines Quebec's current parental leave policy, which, unlike Canada's national policy, provides fathers with a well-compensated reserved period of five weeks (Patnaik 2019). The introduction of this new policy raised the number of fathers taking leave by 250%, which Patnaik (2019) attributes to both the increase in fathers' wage replacement and the label "daddy only".

Therefore, the detailed assessment of non-transferable shares measured by the gender quotient is an essential element of the operationalisation of the policy.

7.2 The *Policy Ideal* and the *Policy Implementation Index*

The *policy index* and its formula are still under development. To ensure a comprehensive analysis, it is important to consider the varying allocations allowed by current policies, particularly in cases where transferable days between parents are involved. This should not be given a fixed value if clear categorisation is not possible due to the range of take-up options. To account for this, the main formula for the *policy index* is applied twice: once to calculate the *policy ideal index* and once to determine the *policy implementation index*.

To explain further and elaborate in more detail: Many policies offer flexibility in how parents share their parental leave, so various configurations of leave take-up exist in practice. Only including non-transferable shares of leave in the analysis grid could result in a distortion of the actual options parents have at their disposal. Therefore, my calculations are based on an ideal egalitarian fifty-fifty split to comply with the legal stipulation that both parents are entitled to joint parental leave. This analysis focuses on policy, rather than on provisions' practical implementation and use, and this index is designed to measure the potential ideal policy (*policy ideal index*), i.e., a policy's inherent potential for egalitarianism.

Nonetheless, in practice, parents rarely divide their leave equally in a fifty-fifty manner (Reimer 2020; Saarikallio-Torp and Miettinen 2021). Therefore, I also calculate a second index (based on the same formula), which follows the very traditional assumption that mothers take as much leave as possible and fathers only take the amount of time that either is not transferable or would otherwise be lost (*policy implementation index*). This *policy implementation index* is somewhat arbitrary because alternative allocations between the parents are also possible. However, I can make a convincing case for its calculation: On the one hand, a second index allows for accounting for legal flexibility. On the other hand, the extreme case of the mother taking all available leave captures the opposite of an egalitarian split.[2] Thus, the two indices represent the full range between a traditional and an egalitarian allocation of leave. This range reflects the freedom of choice that the policies afford parents – assigning a fixed value would make the index too rigid and would prevent it from reflecting the full array of possible options.

[2] Theoretically, the father could use the maximum amount of leave and the mother could take as little as possible, which would correspond to the most extreme form of the opposite division. However, such splits occur very rarely (see, e.g., Blum et al. 2023), so their inclusion makes no sense from an empirical or a legal perspective.

Data and Method

8

This chapter primarily focuses on data, beginning with an overview of existing data sets, followed by a presentation of the survey data used in the analyses. Section 8.1, therefore, discusses the current state of existing datasets. The lack of a comprehensive dataset that would allow for in-depth analyses of the intra-family division of paid and unpaid work, is explained based on Lütolf and Stadelmann-Steffen (2023). Section 8.2 presents the new data collected from a comprehensive survey. The section illustrates a newly developed method for measuring the allocation of time within families and, furthermore, covers the experimental part of the survey. It presents the specific conjoint module of the survey, briefly explains the method more generally and discusses the concrete operationalisation of the variables used in the conjoint analysis. Section 8.3 discusses the operationalisation used for the regression analyses that determine the correlation between the duration of fathers' leave and the intra-household distribution of unpaid work, estimated in Chapter 10. The section describes the measurement of the duration of leave and introduces the caregap – the variable to assess the equality of the distribution of unpaid work within a couple.

8.1 Existing Data

Current data sets do not provide a comprehensive understanding of the dynamics of households' division of paid and unpaid work. As already established in a previously published paper (see Lütolf and Stadelmann-Steffen 2023), a systematic

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comparison reveals that no single data set encapsulates all necessary elements for an ideal analysis of family work organisation. The lack of comprehensive data presents a significant obstacle to conducting meaningful comparative analyses, whether cross-sectional or longitudinal.

Lütolf and Stadelmann-Steffen (2023) have compiled a summary overview to show the constraints of existing data. The comparison revolves around key dimensions that play a crucial role in unravelling the intricacies of household work dynamics. The dimensions, as shown in the data overview in Table 8.1, include the following:

- **Household Representation:** Does the data set survey both partners of a household, providing a holistic view of household dynamics?
- **Panel Structure:** Does the data set exhibit a panel structure, especially longer-term panels that facilitate the study of changes before and after policy reforms?
- **Temporal Context:** What is the year under consideration, as the temporal dimension is pivotal in understanding evolving trends?
- **Paid Work Hours:** Is the number of paid work hours for both partners separately available, enabling a nuanced analysis of paid work contributions?
- **Care Work Hours:** Does the data set provide information on the number of care work hours for each partner, shedding light on the distribution of unpaid labour?
- **Childcare Services:** Is there information on individual or household use of childcare services available, a critical aspect in understanding the support structures in place?
- **Parental Leave:** Does the data set capture information on individual or household use of parental leave, reflecting the policies influencing work-life balance?
- **Comparative Suitability:** Is the dataset suitable for comparative analyses, i.e., does it enable comparisons across different countries and contexts?

Table 8.1 illustrates that each existing data set falls short in one or more dimensions. For instance, the SOEP (Sozio-oekonomisches Panel), while potentially serving as a basis for a more "causal" analysis, lacks continuity in certain variables, making a seamless analysis over time impossible. Notably, the ISSP (International Social Survey Programme) and EU-SILC (European Union Statistics on Income and Living Conditions) emerge as front runners, encompassing household data for a larger number of countries. The ISSP, especially in its 2012 module *Family and Changing Gender Roles IV* (ISSP 2016), stands out for its detailed information on the attitudinal and normative dimensions of the gendered

division of labour, providing a unique advantage for researchers. In addition, it contains questions on weekly hours on all three types of work (paid, care, and housework) spent by the respondents as well as their partners. This dataset stands as the sole source allowing to examine the work behaviour of two partners within a household through a comparative lens, encompassing a diverse array of attitudinal and norm-related variables. Consequently, the analyses previously mentioned in Subsection 1.1.6 were conducted, relying on this data (for the detailed analysis see Lütolf and Stadelmann-Steffen 2023). Nonetheless, while the findings of this previously conducted study prove intriguing and beneficial, they are not without distinct limitations rooted in the constraints of the available data.

One crucial point deserving emphasis pertains to specific limitations of the ISSP data: A noteworthy discrepancy between self-reported participation in care and housework and actual time allocation emerges (see also Lütolf and Stadelmann-Steffen 2023). A significant observation is the presence of a substantial group of respondents reporting unrealistic total work hours (the sum of hours spend on paid work, housework and childcare), exceeding the physically possible 168 hours per week (24x7). This raises concerns about the accuracy of self-reported figures, even more so, as it fails to account for a minimum allowance of hours necessary for sleep, personal hygiene, and other essential activities. Addressing these disparities in data collection is crucial to facilitate the implementation of accurate analyses regarding the dynamics of work and care within families.

In conclusion, the search for an all-encompassing dataset for analysing the division of work within households remains unrealised, emphasising the need for a effort to bridge these gaps and create comprehensive datasets that enable nuanced, cross-cutting analyses. To address this constraint, an extensive survey was conducted and the details of this data will be presented in the subsequent section.

Table 8.1 Overview of data on families and their organisation of work and care

Data	Household	Panel	Year	Work1	Work2	Care1	Care2	ECEC	PL	Comparative
ISSP	No	No	2012	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	No	No	Yes
ESS	No	No	2018	Yes	Yes	No	No	No	No	Yes
WVS	No	No	2017–2020	(Yes)	(Yes)	No	No	No	No	Yes
EU-SILC	Yes	No[1]	2010	Yes	Yes	No	No	Yes	No	Yes
			2019	Yes	Yes	No	No	Yes	No	Yes
EU AKE/LFS[2]	No	No	2010	No	No	No	No	Yes	Yes	Yes
			2018	Yes	No	No	No	(Yes)	Yes	Yes
			2020	Yes	No	Yes	No	(Yes)	No	Yes
SOEP	Yes	Yes	2000	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	No	No (DE)
			2018	Yes	Yes	No	No	Yes	No	No (DE)
SHP	Yes	Yes	2018/2019	Yes	Yes	No	No	Yes	No	No (CH)
			2019/2020	Yes	Yes	Yes[3]	Yes	Yes	No	No (CH)
Underst. Soc.	Yes	Yes	2019–2021	Yes	Yes	No	No	Yes	Yes	No (UK)

(continued)

Table 8.1 (continued)

Data	Household	Panel	Year	Work1	Work2	Care1	Care2	ECEC	PL	Comparative
pairfam	Yes	Yes	2018/2019	Yes	Yes	No	No	Yes	Yes	No (DE)
ALLBUS	No	No	2018	Yes	No	No	No	No	No	No (DE)

Note: *Work1* and *Work2* refers to the hours parent 1 and 2 engage in gainful employment, where as *Care1* and *Care2* refers to the hours parent 1 and 2 spend on care work. If the individual/household use of childcare outside the family is surveyed, this is noted in column *ECEC*. Likewise, the individual/household use of parental leave is shown in column *PL*. If information is available for a certain item, but the query is rather rough and therefore imprecise, a *(Yes)* is displayed.

[1] Using a rotation panel, the same individuals are surveyed over a maximum of four years, which means that a quarter of the sample consists of new households each year. This provides a certain panel structure, but only over short periods of time.

[2] In the year 2010 and 2018 the EU AKE/LFS contained a *Module on Reconciliation between work and family life* and in the year 2020 a *Module on unpaid work*.

[3] The question on *time spend on care* was added in the year 2019, where as older SHP-data lacks this information. The question corresponds to the recording method in the ISSP, which results in the same problem of exaggerated hours and is, therefore, unsuitable for this form of analysis.

Source: Based on Lütolf and Stadelmann-Steffen 2023 and slightly adapted by the author.

8.2 The Survey

This section introduces a novel dataset (Stadelmann-Steffen et al. 2022) derived from a pre-registered online survey collected between October 2021 and March 2022 in five countries: Switzerland, Germany, Finland, Sweden, and the United States. Participants dedicated approximately 20–25 minutes to the survey, and the data collection was conducted in collaboration with *SurveyEngine*, a university spin-off with expertise in conducting scientific experimental surveys. The survey and planned analysis was pre-registered prior to data collection at Open Science Framework (Stadelmann-Steffen and Lütolf 2021).[1]

8.2.1 Sample

The sample is limited to individuals living with a partner and having children in their household who are younger than 15 years. These criteria were implemented to focus on a group facing substantial considerations concerning the organisation of both paid and unpaid work within their families. In essence, the sample is concentrated on those parts of the population most likely affected by reconciliation policies.

For this thesis, in order to focus primarily on gender differences associated with traditional family roles of women and men, only individuals living in a hetero-normative family constellation were included. Given the specific characteristics of the sample, the results may not be generalisable to all families; however, the insights gained are particularly relevant for the traditional father-mother-child family structure. Gender is measured using self-reporting, excluding non-binary individuals in a first step and same-sex couples in a second step. The sample, therefore, comprises a total of 8870 individuals (including 4525 men and 4345 women), with 1953 from Switzerland, 1753 from Germany, 1686 from Finland, 1724 from Sweden, and 1754 from the United States. In the following analyses, various samples are used. To facilitate identification, each analysis will use a distinct sample with a unique name. All samples are derived from the *full sample* described previously.

[1] The survey was approved by the Ethics Committee of the Faculty of Business Administration, Economics and Social Sciences of the University of Bern (project serial number: 142020).

The questionnaire was initially drafted in German and subsequently translated into various languages.[2] It underwent multiple rounds of proofreading and informal pretesting to guarantee that each language version incorporates pertinent country-specific conditions and concepts. These efforts aimed at maintaining a high level of comparability while addressing specific characteristics such as variations in available childcare institutions and types of leave.

8.2.2 Structure and Content of the Survey

In summary, the survey explores the dynamics of paid and unpaid labour distribution within households, encompassing socio-demographic inquiries, details about the respondent's household, and questions regarding parental leave and gender attitudes as well as a conjoint experiment. Before delving into the two unique core elements of this survey, i.e., the measurement of the allocation of time (see Subsection 8.2.3) and the conjoint part (see Subsection 8.2.4), specifics of each survey module are presented. Table 8.2 provides a concise overview of the questionnaire's structure.

Table 8.2 Survey structure

Modules	Sample (filter settings)
A Screening/Household composition	All
B Organisation of family life	All
C Conjoint small children	If youngest child is not yet in compulsory school
D Conjoint school children	If youngest child is in compulsory school
E Employment situation	Most questions filtered based on employment (of respondent or partner)
F Attitudes on equality and gender roles	All
G Leave take-up	All
Z Socio-demographic data	All

Source: Based on Stadelmann-Steffen and Lütolf 2021 and slightly adapted by the author.

[2] In Switzerland, the survey was administered in the three primary languages: German, French, and Italian.

- **A Household composition:** This module comprises inquiries about the number of individuals in the household, their ages, genders, and relationships to the respondent. These questions serve the dual purpose of screening out respondents who do not meet the selection criteria and determining which conjoint module (C or D) will be presented to the respondent.
- **B Organisation of family life:** This module is designed to assess the current family model of respondents, covering key aspects such as the organisation of childcare, details about external childcare usage (type, frequency, and costs), time allocation to various life spheres (for more details see Subsection 8.2.3), the partner's estimated time allocation, evaluations and satisfaction with task division between the respondent and partner, assessments of employment situations and their reconciliation with care and housework, and the impact of the Covid-19-pandemic on within-household work division and reconciliation perceptions.
- **C/D Conjoint:** To examine the impact of policy configurations on the distribution of paid and unpaid labour within households, a conjoint experiment was conducted. This experiment allows for the exploration of the factors influencing households' self-reported allocation of time to paid work, childcare, and housework. Additional details about the concept and design of these two experimental modules are documented in Subsection 8.2.4.
- **E Employment situation:** Given that, according to the literature, work conditions significantly influence (female) employment and are likely crucial factors in households' decisions regarding time allocation for both partners, a dedicated module on work conditions was incorporated into the survey. This module inquires about various aspects of work conditions, including the flexibility of work hours and workplace for both the respondent and partner, and explores how these conditions have been affected by Covid-19. Additionally, the module covers questions related to prior unemployment, identifying which partner has the higher salary, and examining the impact of childcare duties on the respondent's employment situation.
- **F Attitudes on equality and gender roles:** Within this module, multiple questions were posed to gauge respondents' attitudes toward equality and gender roles. Examining these aspects is crucial to understanding how such attitudes and norms influence the distribution of work within households and whether they act as moderators for policy effects.
- **G Leave take-up:** The literature underscores the significance of parental leave schemes, emphasising not only their formal structure but particularly their practical take-up (see Chapter 5). This module shifts its focus to the availability, duration, and conditions of various leave types for both the household

in general and the respondent specifically at the time of their first child's birth. The inquiry extends to whether and how these leave options were taken by both the respondent and their partner. The underlying assumption is that the circumstances surrounding the birth of the first child and the household organisation at that time have enduring consequences for the within-household division of labour.

- **Z Socio-demographic data:** Finally, the survey incorporates diverse socio-demographic information about individual respondents, coupled with inquiries into their household conditions (e.g., socio-economic status, religious affiliation, nationality, marital status, and political orientation). These variables facilitate an analysis of the correlation between potential policy effects and individual characteristics, questioning the validity of the claim that distinct societal groups respond differently to specific policy packages.

8.2.3 Allocation of Time Within Families

To examine the current distribution of work within households and to overcome the shortcomings of previous surveys (elaborated in Section 8.1), a novel approach to measuring the use of parental time was implemented.

While the most valid approach to collecting such information would typically involve gathering time-use data, it is not feasible in this context due to the need for a different survey setting. Research confirms that time diaries are the most accurate way to measure the time spent on different tasks (Yavorsky et al. 2015). However, time diaries cannot be combined with other elements, such as the conjoint experiment, making this measurement method impractical for design purposes. Therefore, a compromise had to be reached that accurately records time allocation while still allowing for other survey elements. In order to reduce overestimation, which is a common issue in other surveys such as the ISSP, a measurement method has been developed that minimises such shortcomings.

Therefore, the survey used the following approach: Participants were requested to allocate their own and their partner's time across four distinct "spheres of life": gainful employment, care and housework, other activities (such as commuting and leisure), and sleep. The measurement intentionally grouped care and housework together, recognising the challenge of separating these tasks due to their frequent overlap in daily life. For instance, taking care of children might happen during grocery shopping or meal preparation. Although the main focus was on gainful employment and care and housework, including sleep and the collective "other" category aimed to make time management more realistic and improve the accuracy of reported time division. During a standard work week, respondents outlined

their daily routines using sliders on a 24-hour bar, representing the total hours for five days. These sliders allowed participants to specify the number of hours spent in each "spheres of life". The same process was duplicated to represent a typical week for the participant's partner. An illustration of these sliders is presented in Figure 8.1. The individual indicators for each "spheres of life" can be analysed separately for a more detailed examination. Additionally, the combined data from both sets of sliders offers comprehensive insights into the current time allocation within these households.

Figure 8.1 Sliders to measure intended time allocation. (Notes: Print screen of the US-version of the survey. Source: Stadelmann-Steffen and Lütolf (2021).)

8.2.4 The Conjoint Module

To assess the impact of different policy designs, the survey incorporates a conjoint module. This experimental survey method is proven effective in political science (Hainmueller et al. 2014, 2015), as well as specifically in welfare state research (see, e.g., Auspurg et al. 2017a; Busemeyer and Goerres 2019; Gallego and Marx 2017; Häusermann et al. 2019) and even more specific in the field of family policy (Oehrli et al. 2024). This approach is particularly suited to the crucial argument that real-world decision-making involves considering multiple aspects, such as configurations of policies and conditions (Auspurg and Hinz 2015, p. 10), and employing conjoint analysis allows testing the combined effects of policy treatments, overcoming the limitations associated with uni-dimensional stimuli (Auspurg and Hinz 2015; Hainmueller et al. 2014). The rationale behind this methodology and a detailed explanation of the design of the survey module are

provided in the following. The conjoint experiment is used to answer the third sub-research question from Subsection 1.2.3[3] and the corresponding hypotheses from Section 5.3. The specific sample, the dependent variable, as well as further specifications on the method and the analysis and results, which will follow in Chapter 11, are also explained here.

The Set up of the Conjoint Experiment

Within the conjoint module, respondents are randomly assigned to various hypothetical policy configurations, referred to as *scenarios*. This approach facilitates the generation of "counterfactual" observations, where the *same* individual encounters *different* policy configurations. Moreover, this survey method offers the added benefit of providing respondents with multiple reasons to justify a specific choice or rating, thereby holding the potential to mitigate social desirability bias (Auspurg and Hinz 2015; Hainmueller et al. 2014). Despite an experiment's inherent limitations in mirroring real-world decisions and its emphasis on internal rather than external validity, using representative samples of the targeted population can mitigate external validity concerns (Hainmueller et al. 2015). Additionally, administering the identical experimental survey across five countries enhances external validity and facilitates the comparison of the impact of policy configurations in diverse political and cultural settings.

In implementation, the conjoint analysis presents respondents with hypothetical scenarios related to family policy configurations, where they indicate how they would, under the given conditions, organise the division of work in the household. The scenarios (for an example of the pretest of the survey see Figure 8.2) are characterised by multiple attributes, with the specific values of these attributes randomly varying among scenarios and respondents (Hainmueller et al. 2014). Each respondent evaluates five scenarios, following standard practice (Bansak et al. 2017), ensuring sufficient data for detailed analyses. While conjoint experiments demonstrate robustness even with a large number of attributes, the number is limited to eight – following the recommended practice (Bansak et al. 2017, pp. 21–22). This limit is set to avoid potential cognitive overload, although Auspurg et al. (2017a) find no evidence of impaired results even when including 12 attributes, concluding that respondents can cope with the complexity.

[3] Do specific parental leave policy designs have the potential to induce changes in paternal behaviour, particularly in altering the distribution of paid and unpaid work time, and what characteristics define these designs?

How would you under those conditions like to divide your and partner's time between gainful employment, childcare and housework, other activities, as well as sleep?

Flexibility of working hours:	Strict presence obligation and rigid working hours
Cost of childcare:	Depending on income
Availability of childcare places:	Childcare places are scarce
Type of parental leave: Info	Parental leave, ½ of which is to be allocated to the father
Length of parental leave:	6 months
Parental leave wage replacement (for the person on leave):	80% of the wage
Parental leave, usage options:	Both parents have to use their share in one block and are not allowed to work during their respective leaves.
Monthly child allowance (for children up to 16 years of age): Info	$120 per child

Figure 8.2 Example of the conjoint module in the survey. (Notes: Conjoint module with parental leave attributes (version for families with younger children): Print screen of the US-version of the pretest of the survey. Source: Stadelmann-Steffen and Lütolf (2021).)

To measure reactions to these configurations, respondents assess scenarios and answer specific questions, i.e., the dependent variables. To capture the impact of policies on the division of work within households, the same instrument mentioned earlier is employed (see Subsection 8.2.3). Participants indicate how they would allocate their time to the four "spheres of life" under the presented conditions, as well as how their partner would allocate theirs. To facilitate participants' indication of time allocation given these scenarios, the survey calculates the average time allocation per person based on the measurement of the current time allocation (see Subsection 8.2.3). This "average day" is then displayed directly in the conjoint, allowing individuals to make a direct comparison with their current situation. As mentioned earlier, *sleep* and the collective category *"other"* contribute to realistic time management, while *gainful employment* and *care and housework* are the central dependent variables for both the respondent and the partner, offering insights into the intended within-household division of work. Furthermore, these variables can be analysed either alongside each other or in various combinations, including the creation of an indicator depicting changes compared to the actual division of time, i.e., a measurement capturing the elasticity.

The attributes are informed by both theoretical and empirical considerations. Consequently, the scenarios encompass pertinent aspects related to external childcare, worktime regulations, cash benefits, and, contingent on the youngest child's age, either parental leave policies or the organisation of school life.

Since a particular interest lies in the effects of different forms of parental leave, this policy area is given a relatively large place in the conjoint. However, parents with older children are no longer affected by this, whereas the school system is of great importance for this group. Therefore, the sample is split based on the age of the youngest child – the group with school-age children and the group where the youngest child has not yet entered compulsory schooling. As this thesis primarily focuses on parental leave, further discussion related to conjoint analysis is limited to the sample with a child below school age. Consequently, the conjoint analysis regarding the organisation of school life is not part of this thesis. Furthermore, detailed discussion is restricted to parental leave attributes, without elaborating on the other attributes in detail.

Parental Leave Configurations in the Conjoint

The attributes used for the conjoint analysis of parents with small children encompass diverse situations related to extra-familial childcare, working conditions, cash benefits such as child allowances, and various aspects of parental leave. The specific attributes and their different levels are presented in Table 8.3. In the experiment, the order of the attributes was partially randomised. The policy areas, including labour market, cash benefits, ECEC, and parental leave, were randomised, but the attributes for a specific policy area were always presented together. Therefore, the two ECEC attributes and the four parental leave attributes were each grouped as blocks.

To comprehensively analyse different policy designs of parental leave schemes, four key attributes have been identified (as discussed and elaborated in the Theory part II, specifically in Subsection 5.1.1), which are used as independent variables:

- **Type of parental leave:** This attribute involves diverse options for parents to allocate and share their leave, considering various models of shared responsibilities between both parents (referred to as *sharing* in Subsection 5.1.1).
- **Duration:** This attribute focuses on the specified time frame for parental leave. It evaluates the length of time parents are entitled to take off from work to fulfil their caregiving responsibilities.

Table 8.3 Attributes and levels of the conjoint

Attributes	Levels
Cost of childcare	Free of charge Depends on income Costs to be borne privately
Availability of childcare places	There are enough childcare places Childcare places are scarce
Work hours flexibility	Strict presence obligation and rigid work hours Possibility of working from home Flexible work hours Flexible work hours and possibility of working from home
Monthly child allowance[1]	None $120 per child $240 per child $600 per child
Type of parental leave	Parental leave freely divisible between both parents Parental leave, at least 1/4 of which is to be allocated to the father Parental leave, 1/2 of which is to be allocated to the father Parental leave, if the father takes less than 1/3, the total parental leave is to be cut in half
Duration of parental leave	6 months 9 months 12 months 24 months over the course of 6 years
Parental leave wage replacement	No wage replacement 50% of the wage 80% of the wage 100% of the wage
Flexibility of parental leave	Both parents have to use their share in one block and are not allowed to work during their respective leaves The division of the total amount of parental leave between the two parents is entirely flexible

Note: [1] These cash amounts are determined based on the average cost of a child in the specific country. These amounts correspond to 10%, 20%, and 50% of the average costs and, therefore, vary depending on the survey conducted in each country. A notification window informed survey participants of the average expenses of raising a child in their respective countries.

Source: Based on Stadelmann-Steffen and Lütolf (2021) and slightly adapted by the author.

- **Wage replacement:** This attribute delves into the financial aspect of parental leave by examining the level of wage replacement provided during the leave period, acknowledging the economic support for parents during their time away from professional responsibilities.
- **Flexibility:** This attribute refers to the flexibility in taking parental leave, differentiating between rigid and highly flexible approaches. By reflecting the degree of adaptability in parental leave usage, it considers the accommodation to diverse family needs and work arrangements.

By considering these four attributes a holistic analysis of the different policy designs and approaches to parental leave schemes can be achieved. This framework allows for a comprehensive comparison and evaluation of the varied ways in which parents may be supported in balancing their professional and family responsibilities.

Sample-Restrictions for the Conjoint Analysis

The conjoint analysis addresses the research question posed in Subsection 1.2.3: *Do specific parental leave policy designs have the potential to induce changes in paternal behaviour, particularly in altering the distribution of paid and unpaid work time, and what characteristics define these designs?* The focus is on fathers, parental leave, and the elasticity of paternal time allocation due to the different policy designs. Therefore, additional sample restrictions are necessary in addition to those already known.[4] By focusing on fathers, only potential changes in the male sample are analysed, and as the independent variables include different attributes of parental leave policies, only fathers with at least one child not yet of school age are included (fathers with older children were presented with other scenarios without parental leave attributes in the experiment part of the survey, as described in Subsection 8.2.4). In addition, the elasticity of time allocation is examined, i.e., how time spent on care and housework on the one hand and on employment on the other hand changes under changing policy conditions. For this reason, it is useful to restrict the sample to those who are potentially in the labour force, from which retired people, people who are permanently ill or disabled, people who are currently inactive for other reasons, and people who

[4] The survey sample is restricted to people living in a household with their partner and a child under the age of 15 and I further only included hetero-normative couples (see Subsection 8.2.1).

are currently doing military service are excluded. Conversely, this means that the sample – referred to as *conjoint sample* – includes all men with one child under school-age who are employed, currently on parental leave, unemployed, studying, in training or an unpaid traineeship, and those who are mainly engaged in caring and domestic work. As these men evaluated five[5] different scenarios, the basis of observation consists of 6075 data points (1704 from Switzerland, 1685 from Germany, 1336 from Finland, 707 from Sweden and 643 from the United States).

The Dependent Variable of the Conjoint Analysis

The dependent variable is constructed in the following way: While respondents indicate their potential time allocation under a given scenario using the 24-hour slider (for more information on the conjoint module, see Subsection 8.2.4), I calculate the difference in hours between this potential time allocation and the respondent's current time allocation (see Subsection 8.2.3). Thus, the focus is not on the absolute number of hours spent working in labour or caring under a given policy configuration, but on the change in time allocation, i.e., the potential elasticity of fathers' behaviour. Strictly speaking, there is not one but two dependent variables, and accordingly separate models are run: one with the difference in hours of paid work, and one with unpaid care work. However, the two models are presented in one graph so that the changes in paid and unpaid work can be read together in one figure.

The idea behind this conjoint analysis is to get an idea of whether and how parental leave policies affect the time use of young fathers. The experiment's policy scenarios may be more generous due to the current parental leave policies in the respective countries. If fathers demonstrate a potential change in behaviour under these extended parental leave options, this gives an indication of elasticity. This elasticity is expected to involve a decrease in working hours and an increase in time spent on care. These results must be interpreted with caution and cannot be translated one-to-one into real changes in behaviour, as this is a hypothetical situation in a survey context. However, if no policy effects are detected, it suggests that current norms are deeply entrenched and other contextual structures and capacities hinder changes in the distribution of paternal time. Therefore, in the short term, significant shifts in time allocation would not be observed even if policies were altered.

[5] The number of observations per country are not evenly divisible by five as not all participants evaluated all five scenarios presented to them.

Measures of Conjoint Analysis

In order to analyse which attributes influence the intended allocation of time between paid work and work at home, two commonly used measures are combined, following recent research (see, e.g., Rincon 2023; Stadelmann-Steffen et al. 2024): Marginal means and Average Marginal Component Effect (AMCE).[6]

In a first step, marginal means are computed. The advantage of marginal means is that they do not depend on a reference category and, therefore, represent the mean of an attribute without considering the other attribute levels (Leeper et al. 2020). This means that general statements can be made about potential elasticities due to certain parental leave scenarios. This allows the marginal means of different subgroups to be directly compared with each other (Leeper et al. 2020). The estimation of marginal means is highly relevant for this analysis, as the main interest lies in the different levels of the two dependent variables (i.e., the number of hours of employment and the number of hours of care and housework), which are measured on the same scale and indeed on the same slider, but also in the level differences between countries and between different groups of fathers. The effect of the attributes on the allocation of time to paid and unpaid work is directly illustrated by the use of marginal means.

In a second step, AMCEs are calculated, which refer to the average marginal effect of a single attribute over the combined distribution of all other attributes (Bansak et al. 2023; Hainmueller et al. 2014). The AMCEs, therefore, help to determine the effect of individual attribute levels, taking into account that these individual policies are embedded in policy configurations. Thus, the causal effect of a particular parental leave design on the father's time allocation can be identified (Hainmueller et al. 2014). It is interpreted as the elasticity of the time distribution when a certain level of an attribute is present, with respect to a baseline category established as the counterfactual level (Rincon 2023; Teele et al. 2018). This allows AMCEs to assess statistical significance between attribute levels, specifically between an attribute level and the reference level.

Robustness Checks with Subgroup Analyses

Various subgroup analyses are of interest. Starting with country-specific models for analysing differences between different family policy regimes, additional analyses are carried out on the employment rate of fathers, their gender attitudes and their satisfaction with their current time allocation. These additional subgroup

[6] Statistical calculations, including conjoint analyses and regression models, were performed using the R statistics program (R version 4.2.3 and RStudio version 2023.03.0). The code and information on the packages used are available upon request.

analyses contain specifications with expected differences in elasticity potential and are estimated to check for robustness.

The subgroups by employment were classified on the basis of average hours worked per day into *no or part-time*, with all fathers working no hours or up to five hours per day, *high part-time* with all fathers working an average of six hours, *full-time* including seven to eight hours, and *overtime*, with all fathers working nine hours or more per day. The subgroups based on gender attitudes were determined using the following information. The respondents were required to express their level of agreement with five statements[7] using a Likert scale ranging from 1 to 7. Based on their five responses, an index is developed and divided into three categories: *egalitarian*, *middle* and *traditional*. Satisfaction with current average time allocation was divided into three categories: fathers who are *completely satisfied*, those who are *somewhat satisfied* and those who are *dissatisfied*. As some of the fathers are currently on parental leave, a dummy variable has been added to further investigate this subgroup. More information on these variables and their operationalisation can be found in Table A.4 in the Electronic Supplementary Material.

8.3 Regression Analysis: Paternal Leave Duration

Regression analyses are conducted to answer the sub-research question[8] from Subsection 1.2.2 on leave duration and address the corresponding hypotheses from Section 5.2. As for the conjoint analysis, the data from the aforementioned survey is also used for this analysis. However, the sample for the regressions is restricted in a slightly different way. Unlike the conjoint analysis, which only includes fathers with at least one younger child due to the two different conjoint settings, this analysis includes all fathers from the survey, resulting in a sample of 4525 men (DE 870, SE 874, FI 923, CH 1017, US 841) – referred to as the *regression sample*. The variables are operationalised and explained in the following subsections, and the corresponding results are presented in Chapter 10.

[7] The statements read: 1. A working mother can establish just as warm and secure a relationship with her children as a mother who does not work. 2. A pre-school child is likely to suffer if his or her mother works. 3. Both the man and the woman should contribute to the household income. 4. A man's job is to earn money; a woman's job is to look after the home and family. 5. A man who works part-time in order to care for his children is not a real man.

[8] Does a correlation exist between the length of parental leave taken by fathers upon the birth of their first child and the egalitarianism of the long-term distribution of caregiving responsibilities among parents?

8.3.1 Measurement of Paternal Leave Duration as the Independent Variable

To measure job absenteeism after the birth of the first child, the survey includes the following questions to cover the three possible types of leave:

- **Parental leave:** How much of the possible leave did you effectively take?
- **Regular holiday entitlements:** How much time off did you take after the birth?
- **Unpaid leave:** How much unpaid leave did you take after the birth?

As a response option for all three questions, a numerical value could be selected and the preferred unit between days, weeks and months, or optional *Don't know* could be selected.

The operationalisation of the independent variable *paternity leave uptake* is based on the cumulative duration of this three distinct types of absences related to childbirth. This choice is underpinned by two factors. Firstly, the analysis concentrates on actual leave uptake, rather than solely on the existence of formal provisions. Secondly, the inclusion of countries within the sample that do not possess formal parental leave regulations but maybe regulations on sub-national or company level supports this approach. As a result, the concept of overall leave uptake serves as a variable encompassing all countries, enabling an assessment of the presence of *functional* counterparts to public parental leave schemes.

For the main models, the following categorisations of the sum of the absence after the birth of the first child were made:

- **None:** no leave was taken
- **Very short:** leave under two weeks
- **Short:** leave between two weeks and one month
- **Middle:** leave between one and two months
- **Long:** leave of more than two months

Nevertheless, to pinpoint potential distinctions among these various leave types, supplementary models were computed for each individual type of leave and presented in Subsection 10.2.2. Regrettably, due to the limited number of cases in certain groups, adopting identical leave duration classifications as those used for the overall leave analysis proved infeasible. Therefore, the following categorisations were made for the leave subtypes (parental leave / holidays / unpaid leave):

- **None:** no leave was taken
- **Short:** leave up to three weeks
- **Long:** leave of more than three weeks

8.3.2 Caregap as the Dependent Variable

In addition to the duration of parental leave, the regression analyses focus on the division of unpaid work between parents. The analysis does not simply consider the absolute change in care time spent by fathers, but rather the relative ratio between parents.

The information provided by survey participants with the 24-hours-slider, as explained in the Subsection 8.2.3 on time allocation, is used for this purpose. The information provided by individuals about themselves is combined with the information they provided about their partner. This combined measurement aims to provide a more detailed understanding of the household by examining the distribution of unpaid work between mothers and fathers as members of a parenting couple. The calculation involves determining the difference in unpaid work between the parents, which is referred to as the *caregap*. Specifically, the caregap is calculated by subtracting the father's hours of unpaid work from his partner's hours of care and housework (or, for the female sample, the caregap is calculated by subtracting her partner's hours from her own hours).

$$Caregap = \sum unpaid\ work\ hours\ mother - \sum unpaid\ work\ hours\ father$$

A negative value indicates that the father takes on more care, while a positive value indicates that the mother takes on more unpaid work. A caregap value of zero indicates that the unpaid work in the household is shared equally. Subsection 10.1.1 contains empirical findings on the caregap.

8.3.3 Further Variables and Method

The models further include **gender attitudes**[9] to account for the respondents norms; the average hours per day in **paid work**; the **number of children** (under 15 years) living in the household and a dummy variable, whether the **youngest child**

[9] The gender attitude operationalisation aligns with the description provided in Subsection 8.2.4 for the conjoint analysis.

is already of school age or not. Further information and descriptions of these variables and their operationalisations are given in Table A.3 in the Electronic Supplementary Material.

To analyse the linkage between the caregap within the household and the duration of the paternal absence from gainful employment after the birth of the first child linear regression models are estimated. Different models are considered here including the above variables with one model taking these determinants into account as added variables and another model considering interactions and analysing thereby gender attitudes in more detail. Moreover, to account for different country effects, I further calculated separate models for each country.

8.3.4 Addressing Endogeneity

A recurring central problem in studies of family policy is causality as well as endogeneity. In this analysis, the relationship between the duration of paternity leave and the subsequent division of unpaid work can be assessed. However, the direction of this connection remains uncertain: Does leave duration impact future behaviour, or do solely those fathers supporting a more equal division of labour already opt for (lengthier) leaves? This question cannot be clarified conclusively due to the lack of suitable data. By conducting supplementary analyses, I aim to gather additional information, fostering discussion on potential causal relationships.

Preliminary indications can be discerned from interaction models involving gender attitudes. It's plausible that fathers holding highly traditional views likely adhere to a correspondingly traditional division of labour, primarily relying on mothers to handle unpaid work. For these fathers, aligning with their own values means maintaining a traditional division of labour even if they opt for an extended paternity leave. Conversely, should fathers with traditional gender attitudes show an effect related to the duration of their leave, it becomes plausible to deduce that the length of the leave affects subsequent behaviour – or, at the very least, that causality exists in this direction. The same is true for egalitarian-minded men: Since egalitarian attitudes argue for a corresponding division of work, it can be assumed that individuals with egalitarian gender attitudes organise themselves whenever possible in a way that divides care equally between the parents. The duration of paternity leave should not have much impact in this group.

In a further step, financial compensation during leave is included to delve deeper into the endogeneity issue. Scholars agree that the economic component is one of the most important factors for the paternal take-up of parental leave (Haas and Rostgaard 2011; Kaufman 2017; Patnaik 2019; Ray et al. 2010). Various studies show that unpaid leave or leave with low wage compensation remains mostly unused by fathers. Consequently, fathers opting for such leaves constitute a distinct subset, proactively participating in childcare without being incentivised by policies. In this respect, it can be assumed that these fathers take on a relatively large share of unpaid work and that the caregap is correspondingly small – independent of leave duration. A detailed analysis, considering both leave duration and wage compensation, provides insights into the potential impact of financial remuneration. To better understand potential causality, an additional regression is estimated similar to the main model but using a nuanced leave variable. This new variable incorporates wage compensation, dividing it into two groups: leave with compensation exceeding 70% of the previous wage (labelled as *paid* leave) and leave with wage replacement ranging from 0% to 70% (labelled as *unpaid* leave). By combining this categorisation with the previously introduced variable for leave duration, a new variable emerges comprising nine distinct categories (for additional information see Table A.3 in the Electronic Supplementary Material).[10]

[10] The nine categories are: No leave, very short unpaid, short unpaid, middle unpaid, long unpaid, very short paid, short paid, middle paid, long paid.

Part IV
Empirical Analysis

Egalitarianism in Parental Leave Policies

9

As outlined in Chapter 7, the first empirical step involves conducting a thorough analysis of the parental leave policy designs in the five selected countries. This chapter aims to empirically apply the first sub-research question, stating: *How should a parental leave policy be designed to achieve maximal egalitarianism?* Thus, this analysis examines the degree to which current policies promote egalitarian family models, particularly the universal caregiver model.

The chapter is divided into three parts. Section 9.1 provides a detailed presentation of the parental leave policies of each country. The *policy indices* for each policy are calculated using the analysis grid introduced in Chapter 7. Section 9.2 discusses the results, including the differences between countries and the variance between the *policy ideal index* and the *policy implementation index* within a country. Section 9.3 presents the proportion of family models actually lived, grouped by country, using survey data. It further discusses the extent to which the lived family models reflect the countries' parental leave policies.

9.1 Comparative Analysis of Current Parental Leave Policies

The following section empirically applies the two indices to assess the leave policies of the selected five Western democracies. The analysis grid, described in Chapter 7, is now being applied in practice. If a country offers parental leave

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Table 9.1 Parental leave policies per country

Countries	Entitled person	Duration	Wage rep.[1]	Flexibility
Switzerland	Mother	14 weeks	80%	None
	Father	2 weeks	80%	Within 6 months, as individual days
Germany	Mother	2 months (3 years)[2]	65%	Up to 3 blocks, as individual days
	Father	2 months (3 years)	65%	Up to 3 blocks, as individual days
	Parents	10 months	65%	Up to 3 blocks, as individual days
Finland	Mother	137 working days[3]	70%[4]	None for the first 40 days (afterwards see below)
	Father	97 working days	70%	Within 2 years, 8 blocks of at least 12 days
	Parents	126 working days	70%	Within 2 years, 8 blocks of at least 12 days
Sweden	Mother	90 days	77.6%	Within 12 years, as days or even parts of days
	Father	90 days	77.6%	Within 12 years, as days or even parts of days
	Parents	300 days	77.6%[5]	Within 12 years, as days or even parts of days
United States	eligible workers	12 weeks	–	several blocks

Note: [1] All European countries set a ceiling for high incomes and except for Switzerland pay a minimum amount.
[2] The duration in parentheses corresponds to job security, the one in front to the period of wage replacement.
[3] Working days are from Monday to Saturday.
[4] Wage replacement for the first 56 days for mothers and for the first 16 days for fathers is at 90% of income (differentiated in the subsequent analysis).
[5] The rate for the last 90 days is paid at a flat rate.
Source: Prepared by the author based on Blum et al. 2023, BMFSFJ 2020, BSV 2020, Kaufman et al. 2020, Kela 2021, Kramer 2008 and Schubarth 2015.

with transferable shares between parents, the *implementation index* is calculated in addition to the *policy ideal index*. However, if a country only provides individual, non-transferable policy entitlements, then only one index is calculated for this policy, as the two indices would assume the same value. An ideal parental leave policy assumes a maximal *policy index* value of 5. However, a parental leave policy that is minimally developed and without pay may result in a *policy index* of 0, which corresponds to the index value for a country without a parental leave policy.

In the following, the current parental leave policies and latest reforms in the five countries are discussed and analysed. This discussion only explicitly covers the provisions for parental, maternity, and paternity leave in each country. Maternity protection, i.e., any form of work bans around the birth that protects the mother and her child, does not form an individual part of this analysis and is only included if it falls within the maternity or parental leave.

Table 9.1 provides an overview of the policies, emphasising essential aspects. Furthermore, the parental leave policies are now presented separately by country in individual subsections, while the calculated indices are discussed simultaneously. The process of calculating the indices involved several intermediate steps and the calculation of individual variables, as explained in Chapter 7's formulas and explanations. As intermediate stages in calculating the indices, Table 9.2 displays additional information about parents' non-transferable shares and the resulting gender quotients. As countries define their policies in different time units, the duration had to be standardised. To this end, Table 9.3 presents the

Table 9.2 Gender quotient

Country	fix father	fix mother	Gender quotient
Switzerland	2 weeks	14 weeks	0.14
Germany	2 months	2 months	1
Finland	97 days	137 days	0.71
Sweden	90 days	90 days	1
United States	12 weeks	12 weeks	1

Note: *Fix father* stands for the non-transferable leave duration for fathers and *fix mothers* stands for the one for mothers. The *Gender quotient* refers to the quotient of non-transferable parental leave shares (non-transferable leave for fathers / non-transferable leave for mothers).
Source: Prepared by the author.

Table 9.3 Conversion values for duration

Country	Leave allocation	Policy	in months	adjusted
Switzerland	mother	14 weeks	3.23	2.58
	father	2 weeks	0.46	0.37
Germany	equal sharing	7 months	7	4.55
	max. mother	12 months	12	7.79
	min. father	2 months	2	1.3
Finland	equal PL, mothers total	200 working days	7.69	5.82
	equal PL, fathers total	160 working days	6.15	4.43
	max. mother	263 working days	10.12	7.51
	min. father	97 working days	3.73	2.73
Sweden	equal sharing	240 days	7.89	6.11
	max. mother	390 days	12.82	9.94
	min. father	90 days	2.96	2.29
United States	eligible workers	12 weeks	2.77	–

Note: The *leave allocation* column describes under which allocation scheme each parent is entitled to this specific leave period. In the Finnish case for equal allocation, parental leave (PL) is halved and then the personal days are added. The last column *adjusted* stands for adjusted duration – the potential leave duration if the wage replacement was paid out at one hundred percent. Since the policy duration in Finland is indicated in working days and these include Monday to Saturday, a slightly different conversion rate applies here than for Sweden.
Source: Prepared by the author.

conversion values for the duration, including the adjusted duration, which represents the duration of parental leave under constant absolute expenditure if existing parental leave were compensated at full wage replacement. Finally, at the end of this section, Table 9.4 presents the results, including the *policy ideal index* and the *policy implementation index* for each country's policy.

Table 9.4 Policy ideal and implementation indices

Country	Policy Index	Parent	D	W	aD	F	Value	G	Total
CH	ideal/impl.	Mother	0.54	0.8	0.43	0	2.2		
		Father	0.08	0.8	0.06	1	2		
								0.14	1.14
DE	ideal	Mother	0	0.65	0.76	1	3.17		
		Father	0	0.65	0.76	1	3.17		
								1	3.17
	impl.	Mother	0	0.65	1	1	3.65		
		Father	0.33	0.65	0.22	1	2.42		
								1	2.53
FI	ideal	Mother	1	0.7	0.97	1	4.64		
		Father	1	0.7	0.74	1	4.18		
								0.71	4.01
	impl.	Mother	1	0.7	1	1	4.7		
		Father	0.62	0.7	0.46	1	3.24		
								0.71	3.23
SE	ideal	Mother	1	0.78	1	1	4.78		
		Father	1	0.78	1	1	4.78		
								1	4.78
	impl.	Mother	0.93	0.78	1	1	4.71		
		Father	0.49	0.78	0.38	1	3.03		
								1	3.32
US	ideal/impl.	Mother	0.46	0	0	0.5	0.96		
		Father	0.46	0	0	0.5	0.96		
								1	0.96

Note: The abbreviations stand for Duration (D), Wage replacement (W), adjusted Duration (aD), Flexibility (F) and Gender quotient (G).
Source: Prepared by the author.

9.1.1 Switzerland

Switzerland did not have any provisions for parental leave at the national level for a long time and even today, it only allows for short periods of leave. For decades, Switzerland has been engaged in a political discourse, marked by various popular votes regarding the implementation of maternity leave (Schubarth

2015). Consequently, the first national maternity insurance was introduced relatively recently, in 2005, entitling mothers to a 14-week period with 80% wage compensation from birth (Valarino and Nedi 2020). The financial remuneration is calculated based on the average salary of the 12 months preceding birth and is capped at a maximum of 196 Swiss francs per day (Schubarth 2015). Should a mother return to work before the 14-week period concludes, her entitlement to the remaining time lapses, irrespective of whether she resumes work on a full-time or part-time basis (Schubarth 2015). Since its introduction, this policy has undergone only minor adjustments.

The narrative takes a more recent turn concerning fathers, as a two-week paternity leave has been in place since the beginning of 2021. Fathers receive 80% salary compensation, adhering to the same principles outlined for mothers (BSV 2020). In contrast to mothers, fathers enjoy somewhat more flexible options, as the two weeks can be taken within six months after birth, either consecutively or spread over individual days (BSV 2020). As paternal leave can be divided into individual days, it can be combined with part-time work, whereby no gainful employment is pursued on the day when leave is taken.

Currently, there is no comprehensive national parental leave policy that addresses both parents; although some additional policies exist at the sub-national level and some entitlements are granted through companies in the private sector, the majority of individuals rely solely on these individual national measures (Blum et al. 2023, p. 555).

Switzerland only mandates non-transferable leave, so **the two policy indices are identical**. They are also **relatively low at 1.14**, because the overall policy package does little to promote a universal caregiver model. The differences between the parents' leave indicators stem from the significant difference between the durations of mothers' and fathers' leaves and the great flexibility of fathers' leaves. The provisions envision a fixed, non-transferable share for fathers and provide high financial compensation. Nevertheless, parents' individual leave indicators remain relatively low. The aforementioned difference in the time mothers and father can take off work entails that the gender quotient is almost zero.

9.1.2 Germany

In Germany, a distinction is drawn between parental leave and parental allowance. While the former defines the duration of the permitted birth-related absence from work, the latter regulates the financial compensation for the duration of income loss during this time. Parental leave ensures job security for each parent for up to

three years (Blum et al. 2023).[1] During this period, no salary is granted; however, parents have the opportunity to engage in part-time work, up to 30 hours per week (BMFSFJ 2020, p. 95). The flexible take-up possibilities of parental leave permits individuals to take it in diverse manners, such as for individual months, weeks, or days, as well as in a continuous stretch or divided into up to three segments (BMFSFJ 2020, pp. 83). Moreover, both parents have the option to be on leave simultaneously (Koslowski et al. 2020).

Parental allowance, in the form of *basic parental allowance (Basiselterngeld)*, provides financial compensation for a total of fourteen months.[2] Parents have the flexibility to allocate the 14 months of parental allowance between themselves and can opt to take them simultaneously, with each parent being eligible to receive a maximum of 12 out of the 14 months (BMFSFJ 2020, p. 19). To utilise the full 14 months of parental allowance, each parent must draw a minimum of two months, which translates into two months of non-transferable leave for each parent and ten flexible months (Blum et al. 2023; BMFSFJ 2020). During the period of receiving parental allowance, only part-time work is permissible, restricting the respective parent to no more than 30 hours per week (BMFSFJ 2020, p. 95). The amount of the *basic parental allowance* falls within the range of 300 to 1800 euros per month (BMFSFJ 2020, p. 30).[3] The minimum amount is applicable even if the concerned parent had no prior income, establishing 300 euros per month as an income-independent baseline. If no work is undertaken after childbirth, the amount is 65% of the pre-birth net income. If parents opt for part-time employment, their wage replacement is adjusted accordingly (BMFSFJ 2020, p. 32). The specific

[1] It is worth noting that parental leave can also be taken after the child's third birthday. However, as this requires employer consent (BMFSFJ 2020, p. 81) and is, therefore, no longer universally available to all employees, further discussion on this matter is omitted here.

[2] As part of the parental leave reform in 2015, *parental allowance plus (ElterngeldPlus)* was introduced, maintaining the total amount of parental allowance while allowing for a doubling of the payment duration compared to the basic model (BMFSFJ 2020, p. 33). This extension means that parental allowance can now be disbursed over 28 months, with the monthly amount halved. However, the payment can be supplemented by part-time work up to the equivalent of the *basic parental allowance*. Parents have the option to select between these two benefit types, and they can also combine the two (Koslowski et al. 2020). An additional enhancement resulting from the 2015 reform is the introduction of the *partnership bonus (Partnerschaftsbonus)*. This bonus can further extend the *parental allowance plus* period by four months, contingent on both parents working between 25 and 30 hours per week during this additional time (BMFSFJ 2020, p. 24).

[3] Another element to mention is the *sibling bonus (Geschwisterbonus)*, which provides an additional increase in the allowance when there are siblings in the household (BMFSFJ 2020, p. 39).

amount for the *basic parental allowance* is calculated based on the difference between the net income before and after childbirth, with 65% of this difference being disbursed (Schober et al. 2020). Consequently, engaging in part-time work can augment the monthly budget while receiving parental allowance.

The classification within the analysis grid is somewhat more difficult, since strictly speaking these are two different policies that do not directly depend on each other. Although the duration of the leave differs from the duration of the compensation, both periods are included in this analysis to ensure that the country comparison yields a reasonable picture. Therefore, based on the three years of guaranteed job security, the duration value is set to zero in the *policy ideal index*. To calculate the *policy implementation index*, it is assumed that two months go to the fathers, because these two months of financially compensated leave would otherwise be lost, as the duration of mothers' compensated leave cannot exceed twelve months. The wage replacement and the calculation of the leave's duration at one hundred percent wage replacement are based on a total of fourteen months, i.e., the duration of the financial compensation. The amount of parental allowances, which exhibit considerable individual variations, are assumed to be a maximum of 65% for simplification purposes. The **policy ideal index of 3.17** does not significantly differ from the **policy implementation index of 2.53**, partly because of the very extended leave, which negatively affects the *policy ideal index*. Promoting father involvement by encouraging both parents to claim a minimum of two months of the basic parental allowance somewhat supports the universal caregiver model, albeit to a modest extent, as reflected in Germany's low indices.

9.1.3 Finland

In August 2022, Finland introduced an updated leave scheme, building upon the already generous options and notably further enhancing gender equality: The new policy provides individual leave entitlements for the mother, known as pregnancy leave, as well as parental leave with individual options for both parents and additional leave options for sharing (Kela 2023). Pregnancy leave[4] lasts 40 working days[5], is compensated at 90% of the previous salary and there is no flexibility in use (Blum et al. 2023). The total duration of parental leave is 320 working days,

[4] Maternity leave can start up to 30 days prior to the due date, but must begin at least two weeks before the due date and be taken for a minimum of two weeks after the birth (Blum et al. 2023, p. 251).

[5] Working days are from Monday to Saturday, thus corresponding to a 6-day week.

evenly distributed between the parents, with 97 non-transferable days per parent and an additional 63 transferable days each (Kela 2023). For the first 16 days of parental leave, both parents receive 90% of their earnings, same as for the pregnancy leave, and the remaining duration is compensated at a rate of 70% with a minimum amount of 31.99 Euro per weekday and a ceiling for high incomes (Blum et al. 2023).[6]

The take-up of parental leave is relatively flexible: Both parents can take a maximum of 18 days simultaneously, and employed parents have the option to divide their entitlement into four blocks, each with a minimum duration of 12 days within the child's first two years. The policy allows for partial parental leave, supporting part-time work during the leave period, provided that the daily working time does not exceed five hours, with the allowance being half of the full-time leave allowance (Blum et al. 2023).

The subsequent high **policy ideal index of 4.01** reflects this policy expansion, suggesting its potential to promote a universal caregiver model. Although more traditional divisions are possible, the **policy implementation index** remains rather high with **3.23** and reaffirms the egalitarian approach. The details of the provisions in Table 9.1 show that Finland promotes this family model, which is further confirmed by mothers' high leave indicator[7] and the tiny difference between the two parents' leave indicators for the *policy ideal index*. Nevertheless, the gender quotient of 0.71 indicates some disparity between parents' non-transferable shares.

The policies listed in Table 9.1 do not provide a complete picture of all relevant Finnish policies. After the parental leave, another, very similar, form of leave exists: home-care leave (Blum et al. 2023). Incorporating the additional leave time envisioned by this policy into the calculation results in an increased total duration of mothers' leave and they no longer reach the maximum value for the duration. Parents can also take advantage of various childcare allowances after their own allowances end. The latter generally take the form of financial subsidies for external childcare; the exception is the child home-care allowance. This

[6] The *adjusted duration* was precisely calculated, factoring in an initial compensation of 90% wage replacement. In contrast, a simplified assumption of 70% was utilised for determining the values for *leave parent*. As a result, the indices for Finland are rather conservative. Supplementary calculations reveal only marginal increases in values when adjusting for higher wage compensation. Notably, in the context of cross-country comparisons, even with an elevated compensation rate, Finland consistently demonstrates lower values for both indices compared to Sweden.

[7] Although there is no flexibility during maternity leave, the more flexible options during parental leave still allow mothers to receive total points.

allowance pays parents a specific sum for taking care of their children themselves at home until the children turn three (Koslowski et al. 2020). I abstain from discussing these policies in greater detail because this analysis is limited to parental leave.

9.1.4 Sweden

Sweden's family policy goes further back than other countries' provisions. Sweden first introduced a paid maternity leave of six months in 1963. It also was the first country to establish paid parental leave for fathers in 1974 (Aidukaite and Telisauskaite-Cekanavice 2020; Duvander and Viklund 2019). Currently, the parental leave duration spans a total of 480 days, with each parent granted 90 days of non-transferable leave (Försäkringskassan 2021). While parents are allowed to take 30 days of leave together during the initial year following the birth, the non-transferable days cannot be used for this purpose. Instead, all of these 90 days per parent remain designated for individual use (Koslowski et al. 2020).

The policy explicitly allocates 240 days per parent, requiring the parent who wishes to allocate some of their time to the other parent to complete a consent form (Koslowski et al. 2020, p. 558). Precisely stated, there are also ten days *pappadagar* available. This offer provides a supportive framework for the other parent or caregiver to be present during delivery, attend to older siblings while the mother is hospitalised, and actively contribute to childcare upon the mother's return home (Försäkringskassan 2023).

The wage replacement rate for the initial 390 days is 77.6%, subject to a cap, while the final 90 days are compensated at a fixed rate of SEK 180 per day (equivalent to 17.50 Euro) (Koslowski et al. 2020).[8] Parents without income are granted a basic allowance.

To ensure great flexibility, the leave is measured in days: "Parents can take paid leave days full-time, part-time, quarter-time, or one-eighth time, with the length of leave extended accordingly" (Koslowski et al. 2020, p. 559). Working while on leave is not allowed, but the policy encourages part-time work alongside leave, since individual leave periods can be limited to as little as one-eighth of a work day. The leave may be taken all at once or in several blocks until the child's twelfth birthday; however, only 96 days of it are available to parents after their child turns four.

[8] Additional parental leave benefits are prevalent in both public and private sectors, with many employees receiving 90% of their earnings (Koslowski et al. 2020, p. 560).

With a **policy ideal index of 4.78**, Sweden almost reaches the index's maximum value. The wage replacement level is the only area with room for improvement. The policy fits into Sweden's general image of a progressive country with an egalitarian family policy, but the **policy implementation index of 3.32** is much lower than the *policy ideal index* because parents' leave shares are transferable. Nevertheless, this value also is comparatively high and does exceed other countries' values. Sweden ranks high on both indices, which indicates that the country provides incentives for a universal caregiver model. However, in keeping with Kaufman et al. (2020, p. 166)'s conclusion, there is still room for improvement.

9.1.5 The United States

The United States stand as the sole OECD country lacking any form of paid childcare leave, consistently lagging behind in international comparisons (see, e.g., Daly and Ferragina 2018). Given its liberal background and a generally underdeveloped welfare state, the United States lack a comprehensive family policy observed in other nations. Notably, the Family and Medical Leave Act (FMLA), implemented in 1993, provides for unpaid, job-protected leave of up to 12 weeks within a one-year period (Kramer 2008). However, this leave is subject to specific conditions and is not universally available to all employees (Kaufman et al. 2020).[9]

While a few states have more extensive regulations with paid parental leave, these remain a distinct minority, leaving the majority reliant on the national solution, if covered at all. Approximately 58% of workers in private firms are estimated to meet FMLA eligibility criteria, but only 16% have utilised it for any covered reason, and within this subset, only 21% took leave related to a new child (Kaufman et al. 2020).

In the absence of a comprehensive national solution in the United States covering either the entire or at least the working population, the argument can be made that there is no policy to analyse. Consequently, a value of zero may be assigned to the *policy index*, given the absence of a universally applicable policy and measures for a universal caregiver model. Nevertheless, the FMLA will be scrutinised in more detail to gain a nuanced understanding, recognising that the final result cannot be compared to the same extent as with other countries.

Concerning the egalitarianism of the FMLA, two issues arise: first, the leave is limited to certain employees, posing a significant deficiency in promoting an

[9] Further details can be found in U.S. Departement of Labour 2012.

egalitarian family model; second, within its limited scope, the policy is gender-neutral, potentially allowing both parents eligibility, resulting in a *gender quotient* of 1 and a **policy index of 0.96** for the United States. However, due to its restricted applicability, further distinctions, including the *implementation index*, seem arbitrary. Even direct comparison of the *policy index* with other countries is challenging. Varying job situations may lead to scenarios where only one parent is eligible, making an in-depth analysis of individual values impractical. Given the low country score and policy limitations, debating the policy's goal as a universal caregiver model appears somewhat obsolete.

9.2 Discussion on the Egalitarianism of Parental Leave Policies

In summary, the countries in my sample obtain the following scores on the two indices: Switzerland 1.14, Germany 2.53-3.17, Finland 3.23-4.01, Sweden 3.32-4.78, and the United States 0.96. These results are not very surprising and align with existing research on family policy. Clearly, though, none of these countries has a policy package that seeks to involve fathers in a truly egalitarian fashion because no country achieves a score of five on the *policy implementation index*. Even though the Scandinavian countries obtain relatively high scores, they could promote fathers' inclusion more concertedly and explicitly. More specifically, they could increase the level of wage replacement and fathers' shares of non-transferable leave. At the policy level, three of the five countries – Germany, Sweden, and the United States[10] – are gender-neutral, which is reflected in their gender quotients of one. The policies described above apply regardless of gender, i.e., they are equally available to mothers and fathers.

However, in reality, the policies are not applied equally, because mothers draw significantly larger shares of leave (Blum et al. 2023). This flexibility between the parents and the gendered starting point lead to significant differences between the *policy ideal* and the *policy implementation indices*. These patterns promote the universal breadwinner model rather than the universal caregiver paradigm. This raises the question whether the decisive nuance lies in the fact that fathers take on more responsibility, but this tends to result in higher employment among

[10] Nonetheless, it's important to remember that not all parents in the United States are eligible for FMLA. However, it's worth noting that the policy is gender-neutral as it is not linked to a specific gender.

mothers and outsourcing childcare and is just not enough for fathers to reduce their workload in favour of childcare.

A more detailed look at the Swedish case illustrates how the country promotes the universal caregiver model: Sweden scores close to the maximum on the *policy ideal index*, which indicates that it does champion this family model. It stipulates fathers' inclusion rather distinctly, by allowing each parent a total of 240 days of leave. The basic assumption is that the parental leave is divided in half. However, the *policy implementation index* is significantly lower, which once again raises questions about the country's promotion of egalitarianism. The non-transferable portion is ninety days and its extreme form produces a ratio of 390:90 or mothers taking leaves that are more than four times longer than fathers' leaves. Although data on leave take-ups are scarce and often incomplete, several cases indicate that the transferable days are used almost exclusively by mothers (Castro-García and Pazos-Moran 2016). In this respect, the evaluation of the *policy ideal index* requires careful consideration, as this index reflects the policy's potential but does not speak about its implementation. In Sweden's case, the ratio of 390:90 days clearly shows that the policy's scope is quite large and that the policy can promote very different family models.

Castro-García and Pazos-Moran (2016, p. 68) also note that despite "the progress [Sweden has] achieved, the length of transferable leave makes it difficult to progress toward full equality". Thus, the current baseline suggests that truly egalitarian policies do not have a transferable portion because, in practice, the latter is unilaterally used by the mother and must be assigned to her accordingly. At first glance, some countries appear more egalitarian, but a more in-depth examination paints a different picture. This is why the *policy implementation index* is so important – it establishes policies' practical implications.

An ideal policy design would provide for hundred percent wage replacement. This may still sound idealistic and utopian to many, although it is already the case in a few countries like for example in Estonia, Norway and Spain (Blum et al. 2023). Nevertheless, this would also be implementable in countries where it is considered unrealistic today: Research has shown that some countries provide leaves that are longer than empirically shown to be reasonable. Costs can be kept constant if they raise the leave's compensation while reducing its duration. The full wage-adjusted duration of the two parents' leaves (shown in Table 9.3) would thus be 2.95 months in Switzerland (2.58 months for mothers and 0.37 months for fathers), 9.1 months in Germany (4.55 months per parent), 10.25 months in Finland (5.82 months for mothers and 4.43 months for fathers), and more than one year in Sweden (6.11 months per parent). Indeed, such an arrangement does not work equally well in all countries because the leave's duration becomes very short in some of them. Yet, these examples demonstrate that this idea is feasible.

Moreover, there are strong arguments in favour of higher compensation at the expense of duration. Indeed, the amount of financial compensation is decisive for leave take-up – more so for fathers than for mothers because many families still are more dependent on the man's income. In contrast, the full wage replacement could also have a strong psychological effect, because it allows governments to send a clear signal that parental leave is valued.

Nevertheless, the merits of such a policy design are not limited to gender equality. It is a genuinely egalitarian design all around. Because of its relatively high compensation, parental leave is available to all income groups and not only to families that can afford it. Generally, low-income families only make use of parental leave if they are guaranteed some financial security, which the current policies in several countries fail to do. The parental leave policy originated within the framework of social insurance, so similar solutions for financial compensation do exist. However, ignoring the path-dependent nature of policy design allows us to observe considerable differences between childcare policies and other welfare benefits. For example, illness and unemployment merit for leaves of unpredictable duration, while parental leaves can be determined ex ante and thus have a clearly defined end. Furthermore, someone can become ill or unemployed repeatedly. Even if parents could theoretically have several children – and there certainly are outliers – the number of each couple's children usually falls within a predictable range, with 2.4 births per woman worldwide and an average of only 1.5 births in Europe (World Bank 2021). This means that the number of parental leave payments is also kept within a reasonable range.

How should a truly egalitarian parental leave policy be designed and how egalitarian are the current leave policies of the countries in the sample? The results show the following:

1. A truly egalitarian parental leave policy offers each parent a flexible leave of six to twelve months with full wage replacement.
2. Various policy packages promote the universal breadwinner model and there is some tendency to promote a universal caregiver model, although there is significant variation across countries.
3. The apparent differences between the *policy ideal* and the *policy implementation indices* show that most policies allow for substantial transferable shares, which costs them a considerable share of their potential egalitarianism.
4. The financial compensation offered by the examined parental leave policies is generally below the ideal.

Thus, the specific shift to a universal caregiver model has not been translated into an explicit policy goal. Even in Sweden, which is the most egalitarian of all of the countries in my sample, the transferability of a substantial leave share lays a weak starting point for egalitarian sharing. As Castro-García and Pazos-Moran (2016, p. 68) point out, the ideal policy would have to allocate discrete periods of leave to each parent: "If nontransferable and well-paid parental leave is the only leave men will take, their balanced participation can only be promoted through equal, nontransferable parental leave, compensated at 100 percent of salary." In this respect, Sweden has the potential to improve its *policy ideal index* by allowing for less transferability and providing higher financial compensation.

The qualitative, case-specific assessment approach has proven effective in the context of the multidimensional nature of the parental leave policy packages in my sample. Not only did it make it possible to analyse and compare individual countries' policy packages in a differentiated manner, but it also allowed me to simultaneously identify specific approaches to increasing egalitarianism. In particular, the distinction between the *policy ideal index* and the *policy implementation index* has proven to be an innovative and informative extension of previous research.

So far, this chapter has provided a comprehensive and descriptive exploration of parental leave policies in the studied countries, including a detailed analysis of their design and potential impact. The following section aims to establish a connection between the current leave policies and the family models that exist in each respective country.

9.3 Parental Leave Policies and the Lived Family Models

Before proceeding to the empirical analyses to test the hypotheses, this section has a closer look on the lived family models in the selected countries. Following the discussion of different family models in Chapter 3 and the elaboration on the promotion of varying family models depending on the family policy regime in Chapter 6, the question arises as to which family models are practised and whether these differences between countries truly exist. Especially when assessing the impact of parental leave policies on promoting egalitarianism and the previous discussion on the different leave designs, it is worth considering if these policies are reflected in the lived family models. However, it is important to note that family models are influenced by a variety of factors beyond just leave policies, and leave design is just one element of the larger picture.

Figure 9.1 presents the lived family models[11] in the respective five countries based on the *full sample* of the survey discussed in Section 8.2. The distribution of family models varies by country. In Switzerland and Germany, the modernised male breadwinner model is the most common, while in the other three countries, the universal caregiver model is prevalent. The differences are particularly noticeable when comparing the egalitarian models (i.e., the universal breadwinner and caregiver model) to the models with the male breadwinner logic (i.e., the classic and modernised male breadwinner model).

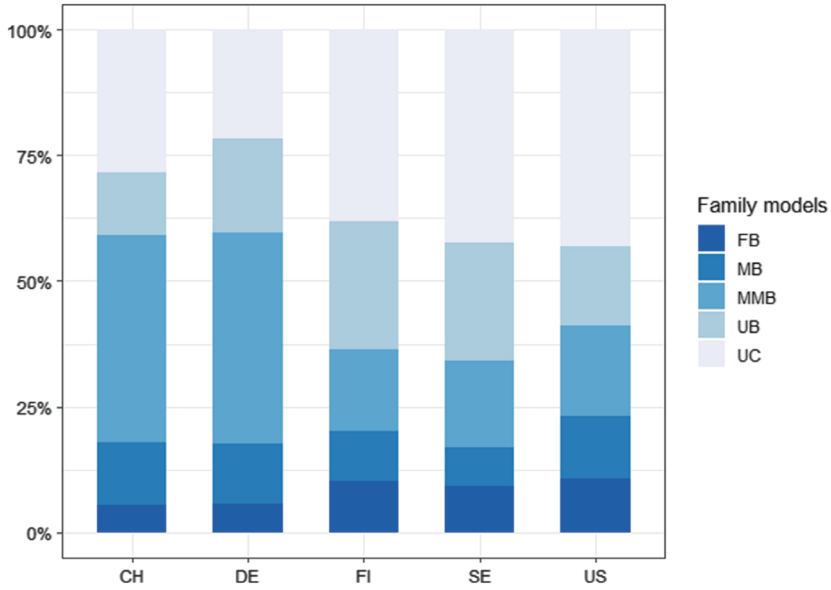

Figure 9.1 Lived family models. (Note: The abbreviations stand for female breadwinner (FB), male breadwinner (MB), modernised male breadwinner (MMB), universal breadwinner (UB) and universal caregiver (UC). This figure is derived from the *full sample*. Refer to Table A.1 in the Electronic Supplementary Material for the operationalisation of the family models. Source: Prepared by the author.)

[11] The operationalisation of family models is based on working hours. The caregiver parity model is missing in Figure 9.1, despite being included in Table 3.1 and Section 3.2. As this model does not differ from the male breadwinner logic in terms of the effective division of work time, it is not possible to differentiate between them.

As the sample is limited to families with at least one child under the age of 15, it is important to note that some of the parents were on parental leave at the time of the survey. During parental leave, parents may divide their work differently, resulting in a different family model. To incorporate this into the analysis, Figure 9.2 distinguishes between two groups: The upper figure includes all families where at least one parent is currently on parental leave, while the lower figure includes families where no parents are on parental leave. As anticipated, there are significant differences between these two groups, with the traditional male breadwinner model being prevalent in most families where the mother or father is currently on parental leave. Approximately half of families on parental leave adopt a male breadwinner model, whereby the mother takes full-time leave while the father continues with his regular employment. This is a widespread practice, although it varies slightly across countries.

Building on the previous discussion in Section 9.2, this section examines the extent to which fathers take parental leave and any cross-country differences. Families where the father is on full-time parental leave while the mother is in paid employment are visible in Figure 9.2 as female breadwinner models. Compared to the *full sample*, it is evident that households with female breadwinners are decreasing or disappearing entirely, depending on the country, except in Sweden, where the proportion is actually slightly increasing. While there were very few families in Germany and Finland at the time of the survey, and none in Switzerland and the United States where fathers alone took full parental leave, there are slightly more in Sweden, but even here it only accounts for just over 10% of families. These country differences are clearly reflected in the results of the *policy ideal* and *implementation index*. At the same time, they also show the discrepancy between the intended ideal and the effective implementation by the families, i.e., the difference shown by the two policy indices: For instance, in Sweden, the policy is formulated in a gender-neutral manner and is designed generously. However, it still has gendered implications. On one hand, the *policy implementation index* is significantly lower. On the other hand, there is a notable imbalance in male vs. female breadwinner households in Figure 9.2. In almost four times as many families, the mother takes full-time parental leave compared to the father, resulting in a gender-specific parental leave. Workplace conditions and norms are among the factors that influence a family's decision to take parental leave, in addition to the specific leave policy. It is important to note that these descriptive plots do not imply any causal relationships. However, it is impressive how this representation of families on parental leave aligns with theoretical considerations on country-specific policies.

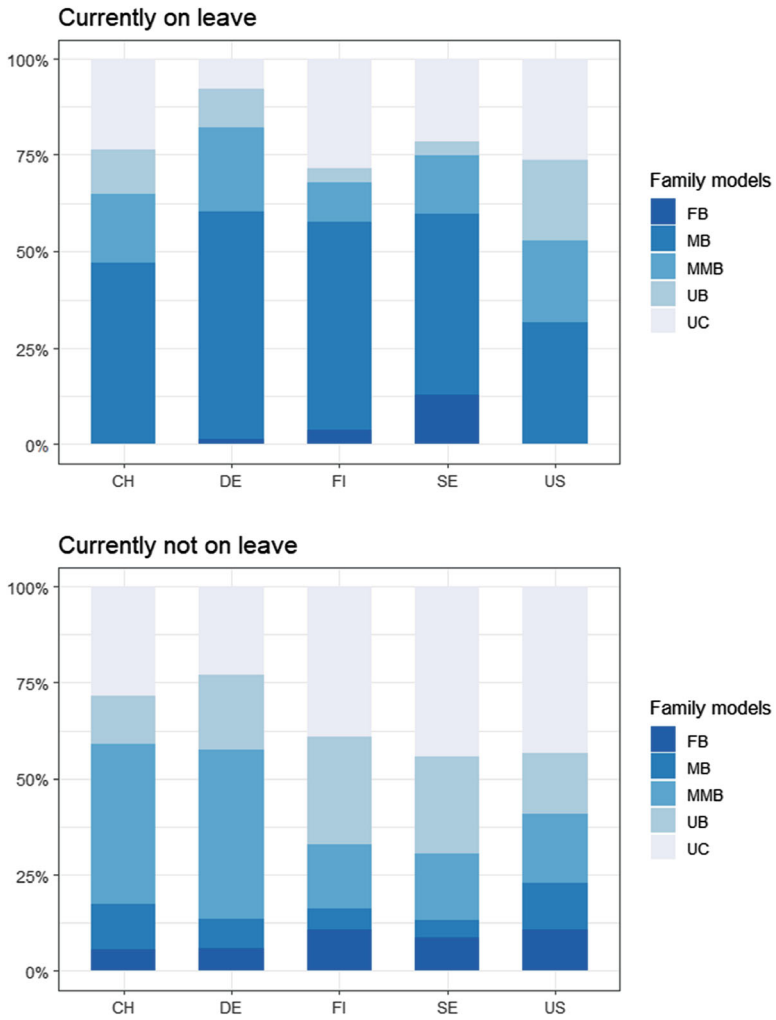

Figure 9.2 Lived family models by leave status. (Note: The abbreviations stand for female breadwinner (FB), male breadwinner (MB), modernised male breadwinner (MMB), universal breadwinner (UB) and universal caregiver (UC). The two figures collectively represent the *full sample*. The upper figure includes only families where at least one parent is currently on leave, while the lower figure includes families where neither parent is currently on leave. Refer to Table A.1 in the Electronic Supplementary Material for the operationalisation of the family models. Source: Prepared by the author.)

When comparing the *full sample* (Figure 9.1) to the bottom illustration in Figure 9.2, which represents families where no one is on parental leave, distinct differences between countries become apparent. The situation in Switzerland remains largely unchanged, while in Germany, there are only minor shifts. Specifically, the abolition of families on leave results in fewer male breadwinner households. This reduction is also observed in the remaining countries. In Sweden and Finland, there are more families that follow an egalitarian model and fewer that adhere to the traditional male breadwinner logic compared to the *full sample*.

Following this in-depth examination of parental leave policies in the five selected countries and consideration of country-specific differences in lived family models, the next chapter aims to provide not only descriptive illustrations but also empirical measurements of correlations using quantitative methods. The following chapter will assess the realisation of the egalitarian policy potential by examining variations in the intra-family division of work across countries. Additionally, the relationship between the division of parental time and the take-up of parental leave will be explored, shedding light on the interconnected dynamics that shape family life and work responsibilities.

Paternal Leave Duration

10

Following the theoretically based policy considerations discussed in the previous chapter, this chapter analyses the duration of leave and the distribution of unpaid work within households.[1] It examines the effective leave of fathers in more detail, based on the survey data presented in Section 8.2. By focusing specifically on the duration of leave, this chapter seeks to address the second sub-research question, which is: *Does a correlation exist between the length of parental leave taken by fathers upon the birth of their first child and the egalitarianism of the long-term distribution of caregiving responsibilities among parents?* (introduced in Subsection 1.2.2).

The chapter is divided into three sections. It begins with a descriptive perspective on the caregap and the duration of parental leave of fathers, which are the dependent and independent variables of the regression analyses that follow in the next section. Section 10.2 presents the results of these regression models, including group-specific models as robustness checks. These models are then discussed in Section 10.3.

[1] The analysis presented in this chapter closely aligns with a separate article, which will be published under the title *Paternal leave duration and the closure of the gendered family work gap* in *Social Politics: International Studies in Gender, State and Society* (Lütolf, forthcoming).

Supplementary Information The online version contains supplementary material available at https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-658-47716-5_10.

M. Lütolf, *The Balancing Act of Working Mothers and Caring Fathers*,
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10.1 Descriptive Results

Descriptive analyses were conducted to gain a better understanding of the relevant variables, providing a foundation for subsequent regression analyses. To assess the equality of a couple's unpaid work distribution, the caregap is constructed as described in Subsection 8.3.2 (for comprehensive guidance on measuring unpaid work, including detailed descriptions, refer to Subsection 8.2.3). In addition, to gather more information on paternal leave up-take, the number of fathers taking childbirth-related leave and the duration of this leave are illustrated.

10.1.1 Caregap

In the theoretical discussion in Section 5.2, the impact of fathers opting for parental leave is discussed in detail. The assessment of their enduring behaviour revolves around the concept of the caregap (introduced in Subsection 8.3.2), which denotes the disparity in unpaid work within a couple.

Table A.2 in the Electronic Supplementary Material illustrates that women undertake significantly more care work across all countries, while men spend more time on average in paid work.[2] To calculate the dependent variable, i.e., the *caregap* within couples, the information on unpaid work was utilised. This involved subtracting the weekly hours dedicated to care and housework by the male partner from those of the female partner. A positive value indicates a caregap where the woman performs more unpaid work, whereas a negative value indicates a caregap in favour of the man performing more unpaid work.

A closer look at the caregap reveals some gender-specific differences. In the *full sample* (men and women together), the median is 5 (i.e., women do five hours more unpaid work per week than their partners) and the mean is 10.3. For comparison, in the male-only sample the median is 2 and the mean is 5.8, while in the female-only sample, the median is 10 and the mean is almost 15.

[2] However, Table A.2 in the Electronic Supplementary Material shows notable differences between countries. For instance, men from the United States and Sweden perform less paid work but, on average, more unpaid work than men in the conservative countries of Germany and Switzerland. Finland falls in the middle. A comparison of women's labour intensity across countries reveals that Scandinavian countries tend to have higher rates, while the United States and Germany have lower rates, and Switzerland has slightly lower rates. Swiss women take on the most unpaid work, followed by those in the United States and Germany. Finnish women take on the least care work, with a median of 28 hours per week, which is only three hours more than their male counterparts.

A comparison of the reported values by gender (see also Figure 10.1) reveals a clear discrepancy. The reported hours of unpaid work of oneself and one's partner and the resulting caregap differ greatly according to gender, which can be explained by the different gender-specific reporting. This is in line with the literature indicating that people report their time use differently depending on gender (Kan 2008; Yavorsky et al. 2015).

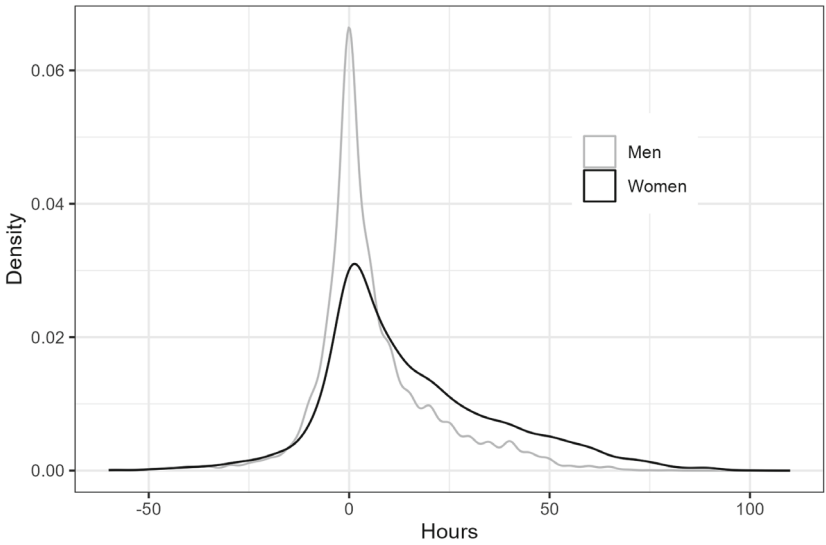

Figure 10.1 Density of the caregap in hours per week by gender. (Note: If the unpaid work within a household is distributed egalitarian, the caregap is zero, if the woman takes on more than the man, the caregap is positive, if the man takes on more, the caregap assumes negative values. Source: Prepared by the author.)

This gender-specific distinction is noteworthy since the subsequent analysis is restricted to the male sample – the *regression sample*. Given the analysis's specific focus on fathers and their leave uptake, it requires information about their post-birth behaviour following the arrival of their first child, which is unavailable in the women's sample. However, as highlighted in the upcoming sections (see Subsections 10.2.1, 10.2.3, and 10.2.4), notable effects emerge despite the relatively modest caregap observed in the male sample.

10.1.2 Paternal Leave Take-up

Prior to testing the hypothesis using regression models, descriptive analyses are performed to examine the characteristics and features of the dataset.[3] This is especially important given the scarcity of data on actual paternal leave take-up, particularly in an international comparative context. As mentioned in Subsection 8.3.1, the main analysis does not distinguish between paternity leave, parental leave, holidays or unpaid leave, but all these forms of absence from work after the birth of the first child are grouped together and referred to as leave.

Figure 10.2 shows how the different leave duration are distributed within a country. While in Switzerland, Germany and the United States the largest group of fathers took no leave at all, this group is significantly smaller in the Scandinavian countries. In Switzerland, about 30% of fathers stayed at home for up to one month (i.e., took "very short" or "short" leaves), while longer leaves are

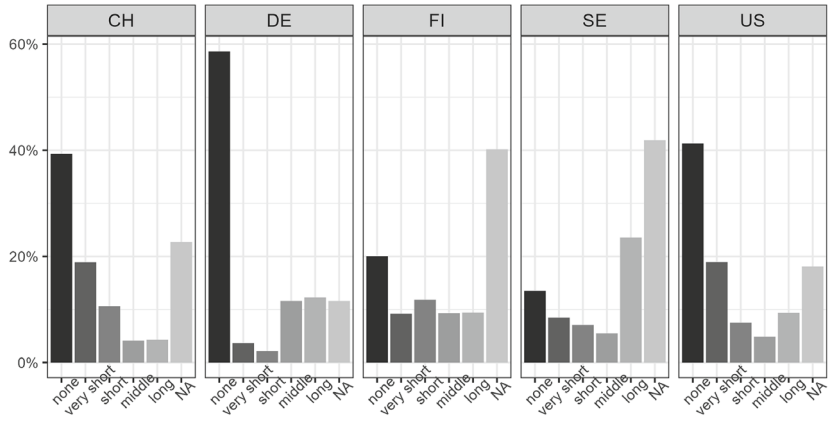

Figure 10.2 Duration of paternal leave uptake proportionally within a country. (Note: The percentage ratios are within a country, thus the sum of the leave categories of a country adds up to one hundred percent. The categories of leave duration include no leave (none), less than two weeks (very short), two weeks up to one month (short), one to two months (middle) and more than two months (long). This figure is derived from the *regression sample*. Source: Prepared by the author.)

[3] All subsequent analyses in this chapter are based on the *regression sample* as introduced in Section 8.3 on the operationalisation for the analysis concerning the duration of leave take-up.

the exception. The picture is similar in the United States. In Germany, however, typically only very few fathers chose such short leave options; if they took any leave at all, it was of at least one month.

A strikingly large number of missing values are apparent across all countries, with the highest prevalence observed in Finland and Sweden. Upon closer examination, a substantial proportion of these cases involves fathers who were on parental leave during the survey period. Additionally, a higher number of young men under the age of 35, each with a single child, falls into this category. It is reasonable to assume that this group includes fathers who are not currently on leave but are still within the time frame where they could potentially take it. Consequently, they are not able to provide definitive answers regarding their leave uptake after the birth of their first child. Given that Finland and Sweden offer more extensive paternal leave options compared to the other three countries, coupled with an extended period for potential uptake, it is expected that a large group of fathers in these countries have not yet completed their leave. This explains the elevated prevalence of missing values in this context. In Sweden, the "long" leaves of more than two months form the second largest group with more than 20% of the fathers. In Finland, approximately 20% of fathers have not taken any leave, and there is little variation in the rates of leave uptake across different leave duration, with around 10% in each category.

This analysis reveals significant cross-country variations in paternal leave uptake and a notable issue of missing data, particularly in Finland and Sweden, underscoring the importance of understanding these country-specific policy-induced nuances when examining leave patterns.

10.2 Results of the Regression Models

This section presents analyses based on the theoretical considerations outlined in Section 5.2 and aim to assess the validity of the assumptions made in hypotheses 1 and 2.[4] Information on the operationalisation of leave can be found in Subsection 8.3.1, while the *regression sample* used for subsequent analyses and relevant variables are described in Section 8.3.

Further information on the operationalisation of different variables is shown in Section 8.3 and specifically for the duration of parental leave in Subsection 8.3.1.

[4] A more extended period of fathers' parental leave uptake is positively associated with a more egalitarian distribution of unpaid work within households (H1). A generous policy regime, particularly through egalitarian parental leave policies or substantial paternity leave, correlates with a more egalitarian distribution of unpaid work within households (H2).

10.2.1 Main Models

Model 1 and 2 in Figure 10.3 show clear results in terms of leave duration: The caregap in households where the father has not taken leave is slightly less than eight hours and then decreases steadily with increasing leave duration, with fathers on leave of more than two months doing just over six hours less unpaid work than their partners. The two models diverge in that Model 2 incorporates gender attitudes not only as a control but as an interaction variable. A detailed comparison of these models can be found in Table 10.1.

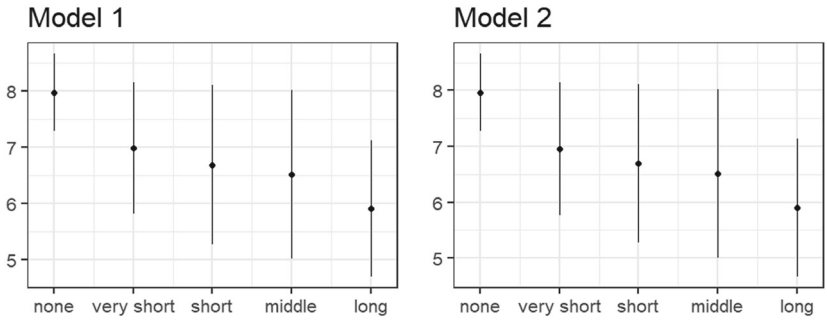

Figure 10.3 Predicted probabilities of the caregap contingent on leave take-up. (Note: Predicted probabilities of the caregap contingent on the duration of paternal leave take-up. Model 2 incorporates gender attitudes as an interaction variable, as opposed to Model 1, where gender attitudes are merely added. The complete models can be found in Table 10.1. Source: Prepared by the author.)

Model 1 clearly confirms the first hypothesis, asserting that longer paternal leave take-up positively correlates with a smaller caregap. In Model 2, on the other hand, the significance of leave take-up is no longer evident. This model appears to be over-specified, as the number of cases within the individual interaction categories is to small. It remains noteworthy that the discernible pattern persists.

A look at the other variables in Table 10.1 reveals a greater caregap the more hours of paid work the father does, the more children live in the household and also a clear difference exists if the youngest child is not yet in school compared to households with older children.

Table 10.1 Linear regression models

	Dependent variable: Caregap	
	Model 1	Model 2
Constant	− 26.614*** (1.502)	− 26.803*** (1.658)
Leave (Ref: None)		
Very short	− 0.992 (0.695)	− 1.409 (2.244)
Short	− 1.290 (0.814)	− 0.631 (2.256)
Middle	− 1.465* (0.845)	− 1.134 (2.104)
Long	− 2.065*** (0.729)	− 1.731 (1.599)
Attitude (Ref: Egalitarian)		
Middle	4.142*** (0.703)	4.320*** (1.062)
Traditional	3.806*** (0.862)	3.962*** (1.267)
Paid work	3.633*** (0.115)	3.636*** (0.116)
No. of children	0.907*** (0.313)	0.909*** (0.314)
Youngest child	4.613*** (0.530)	4.623*** (0.531)
Country (Ref: CH)		
DE	− 1.251* (0.711)	− 1.240* (0.713)
FI	− 6.143*** (0.772)	− 6.158*** (0.774)
SE	− 4.833*** (0.826)	− 4.827*** (0.832)
US	− 4.462*** (0.733)	− 4.461*** (0.735)

(continued)

Table 10.1 (continued)

	Dependent variable: Caregap	
	Model 1	Model 2
Interactions		
Leave VS: Att middle		0.551 (2.378)
Leave S: Att middle		− 0.708 (2.434)
Leave M: Att middle		− 0.498 (2.329)
Leave L: Att middle		− 0.507 (1.782)
Leave VS: Att traditional		0.135 (2.687)
Leave S: Att traditional		− 0.893 (2.905)
Leave M: Att traditional		0.089 (2.960)
Leave L: Att traditional		0.053 (2.406)
Observations	3,264	3,264
R^2	0.310	0.310
Adjusted R^2	0.307	0.306
Residual Std. Error	13.469 (df = 3250)	13.485 (df = 3242)
F Statistic	112.301*** (df = 13; 3250)	69.382*** (df = 21; 3242)

Note: *p<0.1; **p<0.05; ***p<0.01.
Source: Prepared by the author.

10.2.2 Supplementary Analysis on the Type of Leave

Figure 10.4 confirms the overarching trend identified in the main models, as this trend persists even when considering various leave sub-types: Extended periods of leave continue to correlate with a more equal distribution of unpaid work between parents – providing additional support for hypothesis 1. Thus, even though more nuanced analyses are not possible, and even in the versions presented here not all correlations are significant due to low case numbers (see Table 10.2 for more detailed information on these models), these additional analyses provide strong

evidence that postpartum job absence and longer-term behaviour are correlated, regardless of leave type.

While the results presented in Figure 10.4 exemplify the calculation with the categorisation presented in Subsection 8.3.1, supplementary analyses were undertaken using alternative categorisations. Notably, a consistent pattern emerged across all estimated models.

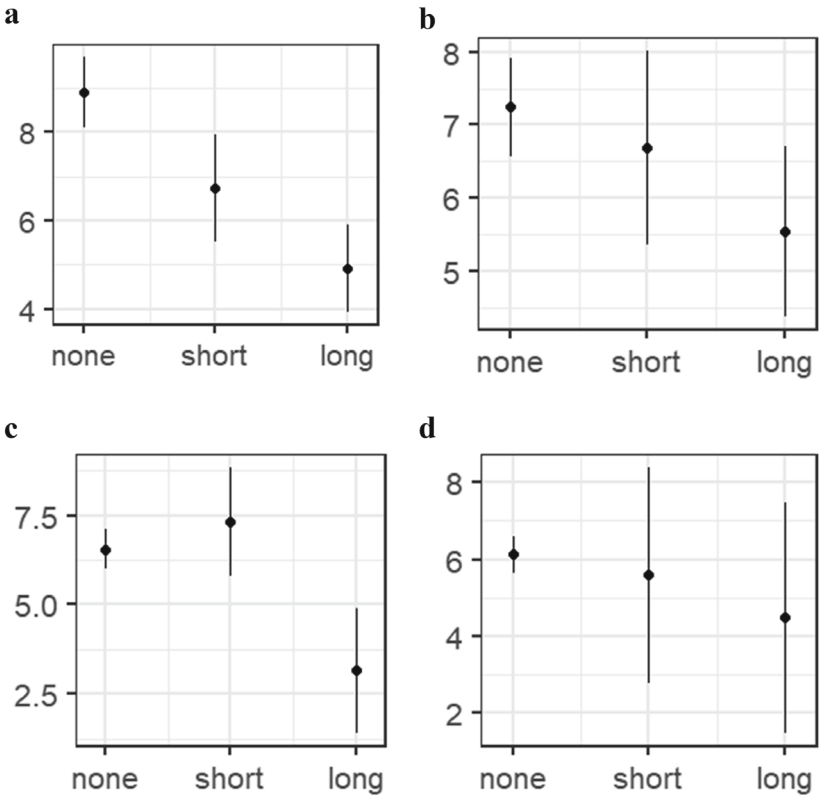

Figure 10.4 Different types of leave. (Note: Predicted probabilities of the caregap contingent on leave take-up differentiated by types of leave: **A** encompasses all varieties of leave, while subcategories of **A** are the following: **B** corresponds to Parental or Family Leave, **C** represents Regular Holiday Entitlements, and **D** pertains to Unpaid Leave. Leave duration is defined as follows: 'None' designates no leave taken, 'Short' characterises leave lasting up to three weeks, and 'Long' signifies leave over three weeks. The comprehensive models, encompassing details about their significance, are available in Table 10.2. Source: Prepared by the author.)

Table 10.2 Distinct models for various types of leave

	Dependent variable: Caregap			
	Total leave	Parental leave	Holiday	Unpaid leave
Constant	8.891*** (0.407)	7.242*** (0.339)	6.556*** (0.276)	6.125*** (0.245)
Total leave (Ref: None)				
short	− 2.150*** (0.741)			
long	− 3.976*** (0.646)			
Parental leave (Ref: None)				
short		− 0.559 (0.755)		
long		− 1.696** (0.681)		
Holidays (Ref: None)				
short			0.752 (0.824)	
long			− 3.405*** (0.931)	
Unpaid leave (Ref: None)				
short				− 0.544 (1.450)
long				− 1.655 (1.551)
Observations	3,267	3,495	3,964	4,195
R^2	0.012	0.002	0.004	0.0003
Adjusted R^2	0.011	0.001	0.003	− 0.0002
Residual Std. Error	16.094 (df = 3264)	15.926 (df = 3492)	15.713 (df = 3961)	15.463 (df = 4192)
F Statistic	19.263*** (df = 2; 3264)	3.124** (df = 2; 3492)	7.504*** (df = 2; 3961)	0.629 (df = 2; 4192)

Note: *p<0.1; **p<0.05; ***p<0.01.
Source: Prepared by the author.

10.2.3 Results by Country

Examining individual countries through separate models reveals some notable differences, although none are statistically significant (see Figure 10.5).[5] Nevertheless, Switzerland serves as a particularly striking example of the pattern revealed in the main model. While Germany and the United States do not exhibit the pattern as distinctly, it is still discernible within these nations. Specifically, when examining Germany and the United States in more detail, it becomes evident that there are comparatively few respondents in the deviating categories and that the slightly outlying position could therefore be due to the small number of cases.

However, the situation differs for Finland and Sweden. In the Scandinavian countries, the pattern is not affirmed. In Finland, for instance, the caregap is at its widest for individuals with *long* leave duration, which contradicts the assumption outlined in hypothesis 1.

Furthermore, the different levels of the caregap are striking. Switzerland and Germany exhibit significantly higher caregap values when compared to the remaining three countries. This observation aligns with the more traditional conceptualisation of gender roles prevalent in these nations. Conversely, the Scandinavian countries are renowned for their egalitarian family policies, a characteristic reflected in the comparatively lower caregap values observed in these regions. The United States, while weaker in terms of family policy compared to the Scandinavian countries, demonstrates comparable results owing to its liberal and employment-oriented foundation. Individuals, within this framework characterised by a more liberal perspective, are primarily regarded as workers. In this context, the labour market assumes greater importance and the United States exhibits relatively high labour market participation of mothers, which results in more egalitarian employment patterns within families compared to other countries (Ferragina 2019). These more egalitarian patterns evident in paid work (particularly when compared to Switzerland) are also manifested in the distribution of unpaid work, ultimately resulting in a relatively smaller caregap for the United States. In summary, the results of the European countries clearly confirm hypothesis 2, while the results of the United States contradict it. Thus, this hypothesis – assuming that a generous policy regime is strongly associated with

[5] In addition to estimating individual models with sub-samples for each country, I also computed a model incorporating country interactions using the full *regression sample*. Remarkably, the patterns observed in the interaction model closely align with those found in the individual country models. This additional analysis underscores the robustness of the country-specific models.

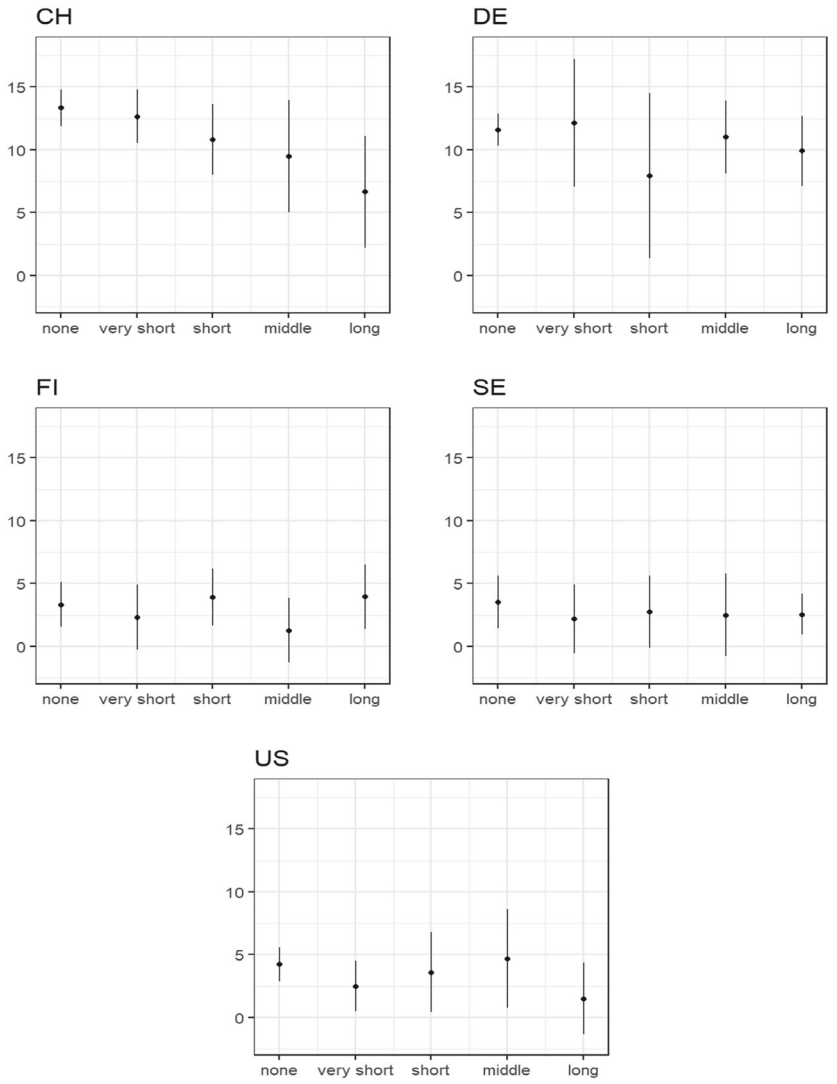

Figure 10.5 Predicted probabilities of the caregap contingent on leave take-up and country. (Note: Predicted probabilities of the caregap contingent on the duration of paternal leave take-up based on separate models for each country. Source: Prepared by the author.)

a more equal distribution of unpaid work among parents – can only be confirmed partially.

Owing to the considerable disparities in the impact of leave duration across different countries, the interpretation can be extended even further: The policy context not only influences the allocation of unpaid work within a couple but also has the capacity to render the potential benefits of leave inconsequential. To put it differently, in countries characterised by a more conservative family policy regime, such as Switzerland and Germany, the personal decision of fathers to take parental leave is closely intertwined with the subsequent distribution of care. In contrast, in countries like Finland or Sweden, where family policies are well-developed and generous, individual decisions regarding leavetaking hold less significance, and family dynamics are primarily shaped by the broader societal context.

10.2.4 Robustness Checks

Interaction Effects on Gender Attitudes

Understanding the outcomes related to gender attitudes is somewhat intricate, given that these attitudes may contribute to the model as a confounder variable: On the one hand, these attitudes impact the caregap, while on the other hand, they also affect whether a father decides to take parental leave and, if he does, the duration of that leave. Nevertheless, this should not pose an issue since making causal assumptions is impractical, and consequently, no causative links are deliberated concerning the norms. Instead, it embodies a purposeful emphasis on acknowledging the heterogeneity within the sample in terms of their gender values.

Consistent with this notion, it is important to highlight that the leave refers to the birth of the first child and is therefore rooted in the past, whereas gender attitudes pertain to the present. Consequently, it is plausible that this correlation has evolved over time, potentially leading to an amplification of one's norms where gender attitudes have become more pronounced due to the adopted family care arrangements.

First of all, Figure 10.6 reveals different levels of the caregap in correspondence with the respondents norms: As can be expected, the caregap is generally smaller with egalitarian attitudes and correspondingly higher with traditional understanding of gender roles. Figure 10.6 shows the well-known pattern of a decreasing caregap with a longer leave take-up for intermediate attitudes (*middle*). As expected, the pattern is less distinct for fathers with egalitarian and traditional gender attitudes. However, even in the traditional group there is a difference in the caregap – if no leave

is taken, the caregap is more than eight hours, whereas if paternity leave lasts more than two months, the caregap is less than seven hours, although the standard deviation is large and the difference between these two groups is therefore not significant. On the other hand, for men with an egalitarian attitude the same discernible pattern emerges, except for instances of *very short* leave duration, which appear slightly irregular. In conclusion, even if the effects are weaker and less clear for pronounced gender attitudes – egalitarian and traditional, the general pattern remains and the duration of paternity leave does have an effect on the caregap.

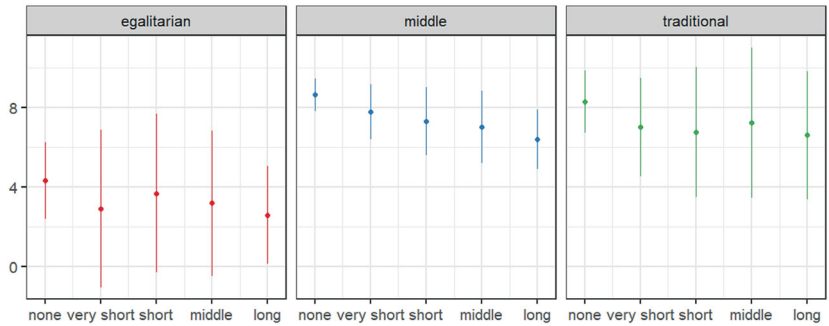

Figure 10.6 Predicted probabilities of the caregap contingent on leave take-up interacted by gender attitudes. (Note: Predicted probabilities of the caregap contingent on the duration of paternal leave take-up and its interaction with the father's gender attitudes. The complete model can be found in Table 10.1. Source: Prepared by the author.)

Paid Paternal Leave

Apart from the prior regression models, the subsequent model also considers the financial compensation during the leave. Contrary to the presumption in Subsection 8.3.4, Figure 10.7 demonstrates that the caregap does not exhibit systematic differences based on whether the leave was compensated or not. Irrespective of wage replacement, the caregap remains smaller when the father takes a leave, compared to the reference group that abstained from taking any leave (though the differences are not statistically significant).

When examining the predicted probabilities displayed in Figure 10.7, there is no consistent pattern evident for unpaid (or low compensated) leave. The length of the leave does not appear to play a pivotal role in this context, aligning with the discussions in Subsection 8.3.4 concerning endogeneity. Fathers who opt for paternity leave, even without substantial or any wage replacement, constitute a unique

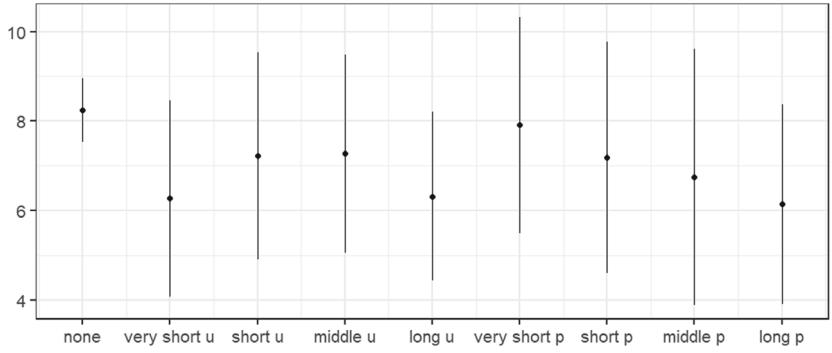

Figure 10.7 Predicted probabilities of the caregap contingent on leave take-up and wage compensation. (Note: Predicted probabilities of the caregap contingent on the duration of paternal leave take-up including wage compensation. Source: Prepared by the author.)

subgroup marked by their proactive engagement and willingness to participate in unpaid work, irrespective of the duration of the leave.

On the contrary, when it comes to (well) paid leave, the previous pattern of the main model emerges: a longer duration of leave accompanies a decrease in the caregap. This result might suggest that taking leave constitutes a form of shock – an entirely novel and unfamiliar situation. This moment of novelty could potentially exert an impact on subsequent behaviour. Although causality is not definitively established, it is highly probable that the observed relationships are not solely a result of self-selection. Instead, it is plausible that the duration of paternity leave could exert an influence on the future behaviour of fathers.

10.3 Discussion on Paternal Leave Duration

Building upon previous research that hinted at a link between the duration of paternal leave and the division of unpaid work between parents (Huerta et al. 2014; Nepomnyaschy and Waldfogel 2007), this chapter delves deeper into this connection. The findings underscore a noteworthy association between the length of paternal leave uptake (at the birth of the first child) and the allocation of unpaid duties within a household. While, on average, women shoulder a notably higher burden of unpaid work compared to their partners, the extent of this difference diminishes as fathers' leave following childbirth becomes longer.

This has been confirmed in various models and holds true for the distinction between different types of leave.

Examining the various country contexts, a consistent trend becomes evident: The pattern manifests within the countries with more conservative or liberal family policy regimes, whereas Scandinavian countries differ in this regard. Furthermore, there are notable variations in the extent of the caregap. In Switzerland and Germany, and to a lesser extent in the United States, women perform considerably more unpaid work than their partners, while in Finland and Sweden, the distribution is much more equal. In essence, the policy regime matters; it influences both the correlation between the duration of paternity leave and the caregap and the overall extent of the caregap.

In conclusion, empirical evidence suggests a positive correlation between the duration of paternal leave and the equality of long-term division of care time within families in countries characterised by relatively conservative, liberal, or less egalitarian family policies. Prolonged paternal leave holds the potential to promote enhanced gender equality in caregiving responsibilities and household chores. These findings highlight the importance of designing effective parental leave policies that encourage and support fathers' active engagement in caregiving. This, ultimately, leads to a more equitable and balanced division of unpaid work within families and, as is shown for Sweden and Finland, in such an egalitarian context, even largely independent of individual paternal leave take-up.

Thanks to the comparative approach, a strength of this analysis, the descriptive findings highlight distinct country differences. This provides compelling indications that parental leave policies strongly shape birth-related absenteeism from the labour market. Although fathers might theoretically have the choice to take time off around the birth of their child, such as using vacation days, leave schemes serve two purposes: to encourage and empower families by providing the means for households to manage these work-related absences financially.

As thoroughly discussed earlier, the issue of endogeneity is a concern. To acknowledge this problem, I conducted several analyses to check the robustness of the results – for example by including attitudes. The analyses demonstrate that self-selection is a factor, as seen in individuals with egalitarian gender attitudes. However, the findings also apply to traditionally minded fathers. Therefore, it can be concluded that the effects are not solely due to reverse causality; the duration of paternity leave does indeed influence later behaviour.

Regarding the data, it should be noted that the results are not transferable to all families due to the restrictions of the sample. However, the results are likely to be more conservative than they would be in reality for several reasons. First, in countries like Sweden and Finland, a significant portion of fathers are currently

on parental leave and, thus, in particular the younger generation of fathers in these countries is underrepresented in the analyses. Second, the caregap calculations are based on men's data, and as shown, time estimates vary significantly by gender. Since the caregap based on men's data tends to be smaller on average, it also leads to smaller effects in the regression models. Third, the models control only for selected control variables and, for example, lack differentiation by income[6], potentially contributing to more conservative effects. Overall, there is ample reason to believe that the effects could be even more pronounced in reality, especially with more specified models.

In examining the distribution of unpaid labour within families and the extent to which fathers take parental leave, this chapter underscores the necessity of policy interventions aimed at promoting a more balanced sharing of caregiving responsibilities between parents. Comprehensive family policies, including substantial and financially well-compensated paternity leave, encourage fathers to play an active role in unpaid work, making a significant contribution to advancing gender equality. However, the next chapter will examine the accuracy of the assumed causality that parental leave policies influence the subsequent behaviour of fathers.

[6] Because the survey questions pertain solely to current income and do not capture income before the time of the first child's birth, it is not feasible to incorporate income into this analysis.

Effect of Parental Leave on Fathers

11

Following the regression analyses with the caregap as the dependent variable, which focused on unpaid work, the conjoint analysis will now broaden its scope to include gainful employment and care. The dependent variable is the elasticity in time allocation under a given policy setting, specifically the extent to which a father adjusts the time he invests in paid and unpaid work. This chapter aims to investigate causality and answer the third sub-question regarding the impact of leave policies on fathers' time allocation: *Do specific parental leave policy designs have the potential to induce changes in paternal behaviour, particularly in altering the distribution of paid and unpaid work time, and what characteristics define these designs?*

As in the previous chapter, the following analysis is based on the survey data described in Section 8.2, where a detailed description of the structure of the survey can be found, and, in particular, in Subsection 8.2.4 on the conjoint experiment and the specific sample restrictions that lead to the *conjoint sample.*

11.1 Results of the Conjoint Analysis

Prior to computing various conjoint models, the data was reviewed. Firstly, an assessment was made to determine if the individual attribute levels were presented equally within the scenarios or if certain levels were over- or underrepresented. Figure A.1 in the Electronic Supplementary Material illustrates the frequency

Supplementary Information The online version contains supplementary material available at https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-658-47716-5_11.

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and demonstrates an even distribution. Secondly, in order to account for the complexity of this part of the study, respondent exhaustion was assessed across the different scenarios. Marginal means were calculated for each individual scenario. Figure A.2 and A.3 in the Electronic Supplementary Material illustrate that the marginal means of the individual scenarios (or tasks) do not significantly differ from one another. This indicates that there was no fatigue experienced by the interviewees during the experiment that could have distorted the results.

11.1.1 Full Model

Figure 11.1 shows the results of the full conjoint model, i.e., the elasticity of men's time allocation under different parental leave policy designs. As this analysis is centred on parental leave policy, this chapter solely presents the results for the four attributes of parental leave. The complete conjoint model, which includes additional attributes related to childcare, childcare benefits, and working time flexibility, can be found in Figure A.4 in the Electronic Supplementary Material.

Figure 11.1 illustrates a high degree of elasticity. All attribute levels have a significant impact on the distribution of employment and care hours. The marginal means indicate that, under the given policy designs, fathers would perform less paid work and more care work. In almost all scenarios, there would be an average reduction of around 40 minutes in daily employment and an average increase of over 20 minutes in daily care work (30 minutes is equivalent to 0.5 on the x-axis scale). As the reduction in employment hours is greater than the increase in care hours, the question arises as to what happens in the time that is freed up. Additional analyses that include the two other "spheres of life" can be found in the Electronic Supplementary Material in Figure A.6. While the number of hours of sleep per week remains the same, the time for the "other" category increases significantly. This indicates that the reduced employment hours would not only be allocated to care work, but also to other activities.

The level "no wage replacement" of the economic attribute is the only exception where there is almost no change in time allocation. However, this attribute level is the only level that clearly represents a poorly developed parental leave design. This confirms hypothesis 3[1]: A more generous parental leave, as compared to poorly developed parental leave with no wage replacement, leads to

[1] *Generous leave* leads to a reduction in fathers' employment hours and an increase in unpaid care and domestic work hours (H3).

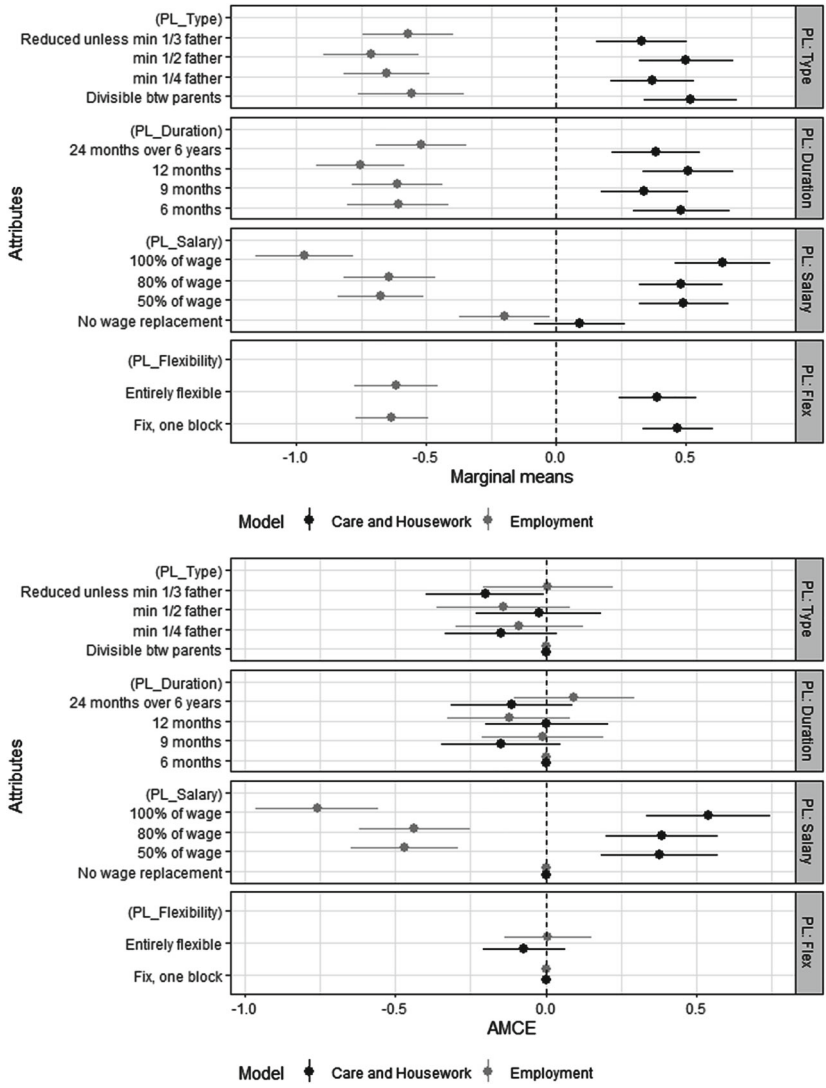

Figure 11.1 Conjoint model 1: Men's time allocation for different parental leave policies. (Note: Marginal means and AMCE with 95% confidence interval. PL stands for parental leave. Source: Prepared by the author.)

a reduction in fathers' employment hours and an increase in unpaid care and domestic work hours. In contrast, there is no significant difference in paternal behaviour based on different policy designs for the other attributes, such as type, duration, and flexibility. This is reflected in the lack of significance of the corresponding AMCEs.[2] With the exception of wage replacement, there are no relevant differences in how generous and egalitarian parental leave is structured.

The results for the wage replacement attribute differ from the other attributes also concerning effect size. While the effect size for the other attributes is roughly the same and the attribute levels do not play a role, wage replacement is a clear exception. It seems that the allocation, duration, and flexibility of parental leave have an impact on the outcome, but the specific design does not appear to be significant. This is reflected in significant differences depending on the attribute level, as confirmed by the AMCE calculations. The results indicate that full wage replacement leads to a significant reduction in fathers' paid work, by almost one hour per day, and an increase in their care work hours, by almost 40 minutes. Therefore, hypothesis 3a[3] is supported. This policy response is already evident in the case of partial financial compensation, albeit to a lesser extent. Figure 11.1 illustrates this phenomenon through both the marginal means and the AMCE calculations, revealing a V-shaped pattern. If the findings show a V-shaped pattern, it suggests that when there is a higher level of wage replacement, fathers are inclined to reduce their paid working hours and increase the time devoted to caregiving.

11.1.2 Models by Country

To test hypothesis 4[4], additional country models were estimated. The results, shown in Figure 11.2, indicate significant country differences. The effects observed in Switzerland and Germany are similar to those in the main model

[2] AMCEs always refer to a baseline. If the effect size of an attribute level differs significantly from the effect size of the baseline attribute, this is reflected in significant AMCE values for that corresponding attribute level. As with the marginal means, 1 on the x-axis corresponds to an hour. Therefore, if an attribute level has an AMCE value of 0.5, the effect sizes of that attribute level differ by 30 minutes from the baseline level.

[3] The level of wage replacement is the policy attribute that most significantly influences fathers' behaviour, with a high level of wage replacement increasing fathers' care time at the expense of employment (H3a).

[4] The elasticity of fathers towards egalitarian family models depends on the family policy regime of the respective country (H4).

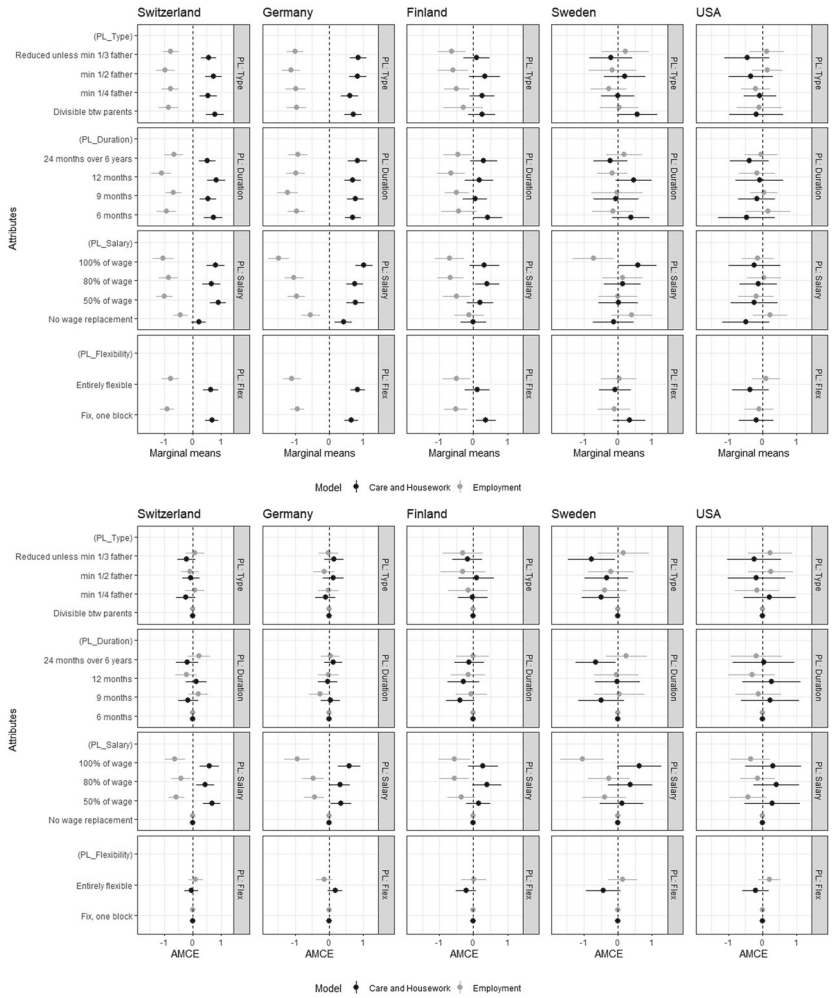

Figure 11.2 Conjoint model 2: Men's time allocation by country of residence. (Note: Marginal means and AMCE with 95% confidence interval. PL stands for parental leave. Source: Prepared by the author.)

(see Figure 11.1). However, the time shifts reported by fathers from Finland are significantly smaller and, in some cases, no longer significant. Furthermore, fathers in Sweden in comparison to the main model no longer exhibit elasticity. However, there is one exception to this finding: Providing full wage replacement leads to a significant decrease in gainful employment, even among fathers in Sweden. This has been confirmed both in the calculation of marginal means and in the calculation of AMCE. The results from the United States sample do not show any significance, indicating that these fathers do not react to policy changes.

Hypothesis 4 stating that the elasticity of fathers towards egalitarian family models depends on the family policy regime of the respective country is supported by this evidence and can be accepted. Consistent with the hypothesis, fathers from Scandinavian countries exhibit significantly less elasticity due to the generous parental leave policies offered in Finland and Sweden. In contrast, Swiss fathers have limited leave options, and as a result, they demonstrate significant elasticity when presented with more generous options. Although Germany offers more extensive parental leave than Switzerland, it still falls significantly short of Scandinavian policies. Furthermore, the family policy regime in Germany is similar to that of Switzerland due to its conservative background, which is reflected in the findings of the German sample. Although the United States does not offer paid parental leave, this sample did not show any changes in potential paternal behaviour. This aligns with the liberal welfare regime, where market-based solutions are standard, rather than government policies.

11.1.3 Supplementary Analyses of Subgroups as Robustness Checks

Additional group-specific analyses were conducted to provide more detailed insights and confirm the robustness of the results.

An additional model was estimated to test whether the group of fathers currently on parental leave influences the results of the overall *conjoint sample.* However, the corresponding models in Figure A.5 in the Electronic Supplementary Material show that due to the very low number of fathers currently on parental leave, the results do not significantly change and this differentiation does not need to be further investigated.

Accounting for Current Employment Hours

The elasticity of working hours may differ among fathers, depending on their current workload. It is important to note that fathers who are currently unemployed, for example, can hardly reduce their working hours – regardless of the policy setting. Additionally, fathers who already work part-time are more likely to have less elasticity than those who work full-time. Similar opportunities for elasticity, but in reverse, can be assumed with regard to care and household hours. Fathers who work full-time or more gainful employment have little time left for unpaid work on an average working day, but they have the potential to increase it. In order to include these different starting points in the analysis, a group-specific model is estimated based on the current employment situation. The model is presented in Figure 11.3.

Although the findings are not that surprising, they yet produce relevant insight for implications: Fathers who already work part-time, working an average of six hours per day (high part-time), show no elasticity. As one central aim of providing more generous leave opportunities for fathers is to increase their participation in care tasks, it is important to note that fathers who are already working part-time and taking on an active caring role may not have much potential for further change. As a result, the elasticity of this group is limited.

The results for men in full-time employment and those working an average of 9 hours or more per day are comparable to the main model. However, the effects for men working overtime are almost twice as large as for those in full-time employment, as shown by the marginal means. This confirms the assumption that the more hours worked, the greater the potential for a reduction in these hours. Additionally, significant AMCEs are found in terms of financial compensation. The – theoretically expected – V-shaped pattern is most evident in the overtime group, where higher compensation is associated with a decrease in gainful employment and an increase in care. This pattern is observed in Figure 11.3 in both marginal means and AMCEs.

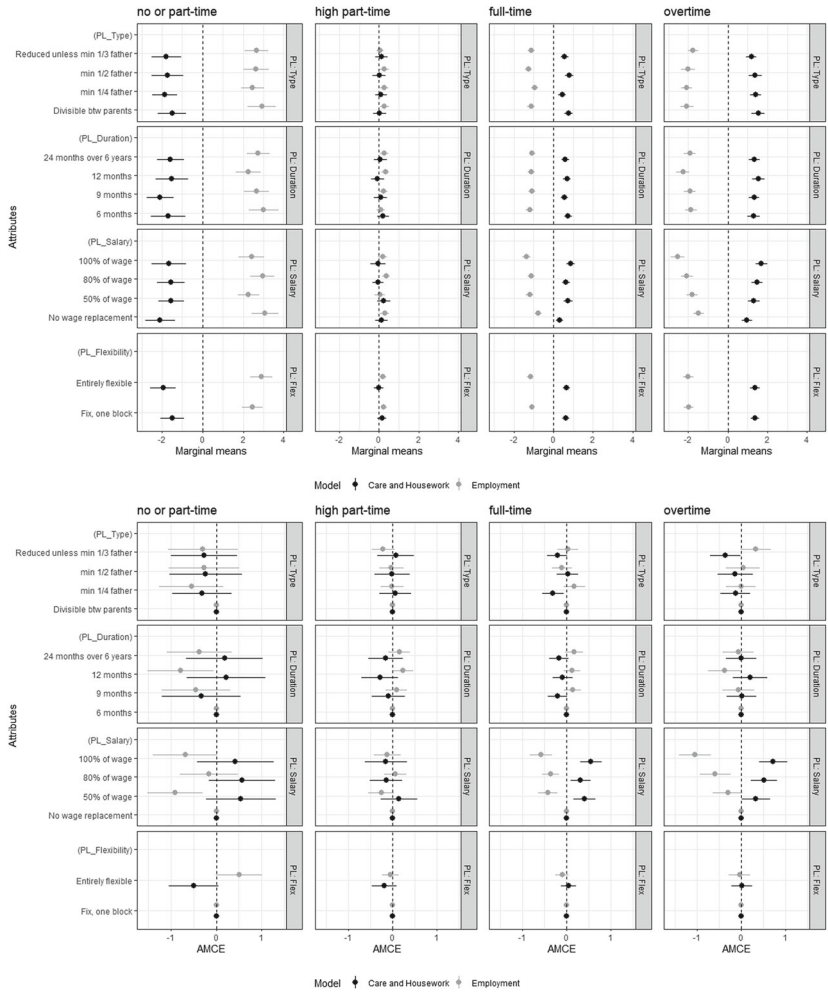

Figure 11.3 Conjoint model 3: Men's time allocation by employment. (Note: Marginal means and AMCE with 95% confidence interval. PL stands for parental leave. Source: Prepared by the author.)

Respondents' Gender Attitudes

As stated in Subsections 8.3.4 and 10.2.4, the respondents' attitude can also have an impact. Therefore, it is important to consider the influence of attitude as a robustness check on the outcome. It can be assumed that men who hold egalitarian views may already have a more equal division of labour and, therefore, may be less responsive to policies. Conversely, it is reasonable to assume that men with a traditional understanding of gender roles are less responsive to policies because they have a clear preference for a traditional division of labour. If these assumptions are confirmed, men with a moderate mindset may show the strongest elasticities.

Figure 11.4 shows the results categorised by gender attitudes. The assumptions are not verified. The group-specific effects by gender attitudes do not differ greatly from each other. The group with middle attitudes only distinguishes itself from the other two groups by smaller confidence intervals, which is primarily due to its larger size (as indicated in Table A.4 in the Electronic Supplementary Material). Even men who hold traditional gender attitudes exhibit some elasticity. Despite their traditional views, this subgroup exhibits significant marginal means with an average reduction in employment of around 45 minutes and a corresponding increase in unpaid work. While the elasticity for egalitarian men primarily applies to labour market activity, it hardly applies to unpaid work. Additionally, the pattern of wage replacement once again follows a V-shape for both marginal means and AMCEs when specified by middle attitudes.

Considerations on Satisfaction with Current Time Allocation

To identify the group of men with the greatest potential for elasticity, a third specification is based on their satisfaction with the current allocation of time. It is assumed that men who are fully satisfied with the current situation would be unlikely to make any adjustments even under changed policy conditions. However, a high degree of elasticity is expected, particularly among men who are dissatisfied with their current situation.

As expected and presented in Figure 11.5, there is little significant change in the group who report being completely satisfied. However, the V-pattern in wage replacement is partially significant.

The elasticities of men who are somewhat satisfied, depicted in the middle of Figure 11.5, are similar to those in the main model for the entire *conjoint sample* (shown in Figure 11.1), albeit with slightly smaller effect sizes.

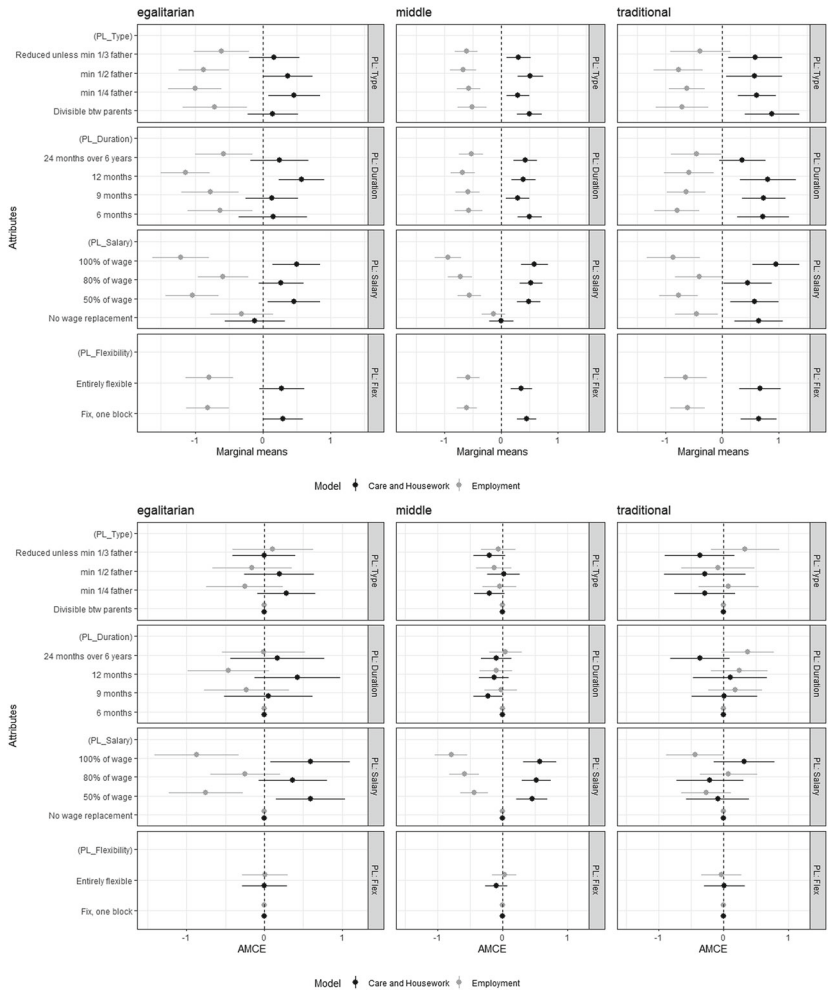

Figure 11.4 Conjoint model 4: Men's time allocation by gender attitudes. (Note: Marginal means and AMCE with 95% confidence interval. PL stands for parental leave. Source: Prepared by the author.)

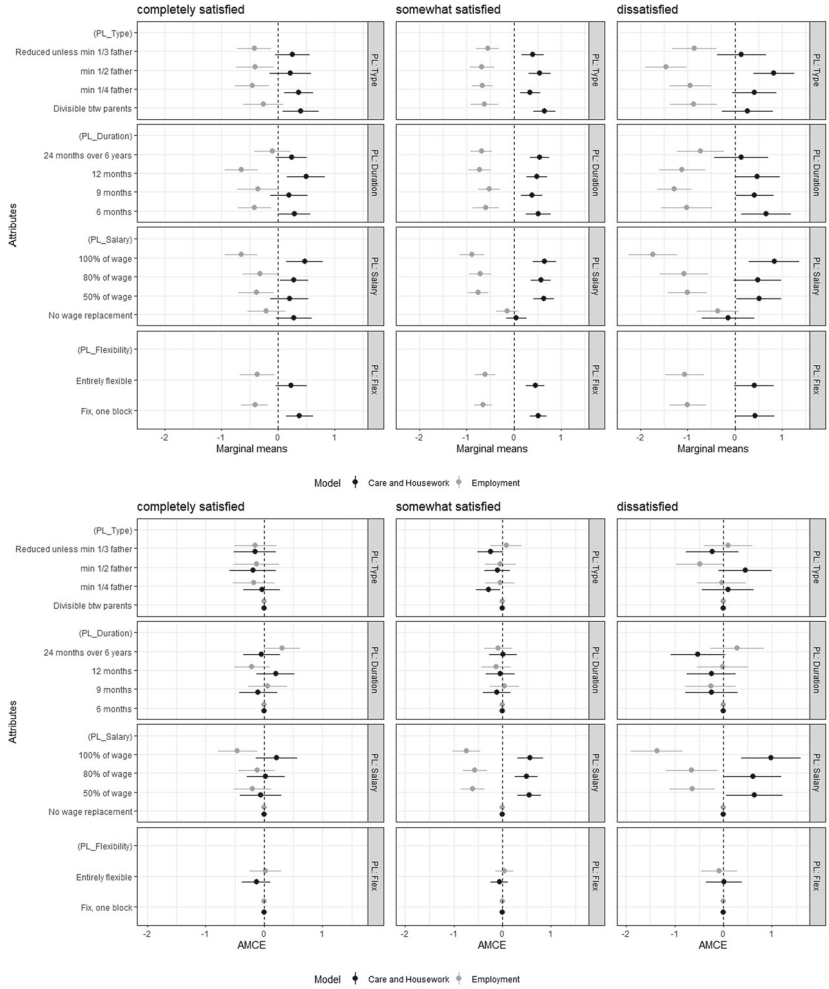

Figure 11.5 Conjoint model 5: Men's time allocation by satisfaction with current average time allocation. (Note: Marginal means and AMCE with 95% confidence interval. PL stands for parental leave. Source: Prepared by the author.)

It is noteworthy that the results for men who reported being dissatisfied with their current situation do not align with expectations. Although certain policies may result in a decrease in paid employment, any increase in unpaid work is likely to be insignificant. However, the V-pattern is once again discernible in the case of wage replacement.

11.2 Discussion of the Conjoint Results

Overall, fathers have demonstrated a willingness to reduce their employment hours and increase their unpaid labour – they show elasticity towards more egalitarian work divisions. However, the impact of policy design on this behaviour is only significant in exceptional cases, as reflected in the barely significant AMCE estimations.

Although there is a decrease in the time spent on gainful employment and an increase in the time spent on care, these shifts are not equal. It is important to note that gainful employment time is not exclusively being reduced in favour of care time, as employment hours are decreasing more than unpaid time is increasing. As previously stated, the supplementary analyses (refer to Figure A.6 in the Electronic Supplementary Material) reveal an increase in the amount of time allocated to the residual category 'other'. However, it is unclear whether this additional time would be used for leisure activities, voluntary work, or other purposes, as this fourth category is residual.

11.2.1 Wage Replacement

Across different models, wage replacement consistently results in significant behavioural changes. If the results indicate a distinct V-shaped trend, this indicates that as wage replacement becomes more generous, fathers tend to decrease their paid work and increase their caregiving hours. Although not all figures display this pattern precisely, it remains recognisable across various models. The recurring V-shaped pattern of this policy attribute indicates, firstly, that wage replacement is essential (as opposed to no financial compensation) and, secondly, that full wage replacement, in particular, can induce decisive behavioural adjustments on top. For example, even among men in Sweden, who otherwise show no elasticity, there is a significant reduction in working hours when the financial compensation is set at one hundred percent. Another example pertains to

men with traditional gender norms, who also exhibit a significant reduction in working hours when receiving full pay. Fathers who report being fully satisfied with the current division of labour demonstrate the same elasticity. To summarise, significant reductions in employment hours still occur even in subgroups where theoretically the smallest or no elasticity is expected, as long as there is one hundred percent wage compensation.

There are three reasons why the attribute of financial compensation stands out. The first reason relates to the financial aspect of this attribute. As previously stated, men are often the primary earners and many families depend on the father's income. Therefore, it is not surprising that the father's behaviour is particularly influenced by financial considerations. Secondly, estimating the consequences of different levels of this attribute is relatively straightforward. It is not difficult to predict the impact of wage reductions or determine their economic feasibility for a family. Full wage replacement means no financial loss for the family, making it affordable for any father to take parental leave. However, the absence of wage replacement or a reduced income can pose challenges for families, particularly during times of economic hardship. Fathers may choose not to opt for parental leave if they believe they cannot afford to do so and, therefore, they do not adjust their employment or caregiving hours. The third reason lies in the design of the specific experiment. While this economic attribute clearly indicates a negative level with 'no wage replacement', the differences within the other attributes are less distinct. For all levels of the leave division attribute, fathers have the option to receive a significant portion of the leave, as the minimum amount is primarily established and, therefore, varies. From the perspective of fathers, the duration of leave does not make a significant difference since they often take only a small proportion of it anyway. This attribute may be more relevant for mothers. Concerning the fourth attribute, flexibility, it is worth considering whether more flexible options have a significant impact on leave uptake and its outcomes. While desirable, leave uptake and its outcomes do not necessarily depend on these factors.

11.2.2 The Complexity of Leave Impact Perception

Conversely, this also provides clues as to why the other three attributes do not exhibit significant differences in level. On the one hand, the level differences – as discussed – hardly show any relevant variance, especially for fathers. In particular, a level that provides a clear disincentive, i.e., a very minimalist policy design, is missing.

On the other hand, a very important point is the complexity, not of the conjoint as a method in itself, which has been tested and studied many times, but specifically with regard to parental leave.[5] Although the *conjoint sample* only includes individuals with a child below school age, and, hence, this initial phase with a newborn has not long been past, it is still difficult to estimate the long-term effects of a longer break in employment and the associated intensified involvement at home. Assuming that the beginning of parenthood, and thus the situation at the birth of the first child, is particularly crucial for the organisation and distribution of responsibilities within the household, the decisive moment for fathers with multiple children may be further in the past. This makes it more challenging to evaluate other leave options. As demonstrated in the subgroup analysis in the Electronic Supplementary Material (see Figure A.5), only a small proportion of fathers are currently on leave. The vast majority have settled into regular everyday life, they are integrated into the workforce and family responsibilities are distributed and familiarised. The conjoint scenarios presented are highly hypothetical and require a great deal of imaginative thinking to adjust to potential changes in time allocation.

In this respect, the results can rather be interpreted or at least understood as an indication that fathers are willing to take on more caregiving responsibilities at home and reduce gainful employment or have at least internalised that such a reallocation of time might be desirable, be it due to changing social norms or personal preferences.

11.2.3 Family Policy Regimes

The complexity and high level of effort in terms of imagination further matches the results from the United States. It is noteworthy that this sample does not exhibit any elasticity. In contrast to European fathers, most fathers in the United States do not have access to paid parental leave, and family policies are generally very limited. Without experience with some form of comparable policy, it is almost impossible to estimate potential behaviour under different family policy scenarios. But there are also cultural and social factors that are closely related to the family policy regime in the United States. Workplace norms, characterised by a strong commitment to employment, shape this (Petts 2023). It can be assumed

[5] To address concerns that the experiment may have caused respondent fatigue, additional analyses were conducted to account for this possibility. The models used for these analyses are presented in Figures A.2 and A.3 in the Electronic Supplementary Material.

that, at least in the short term, even if parental leave were available, many parents, especially fathers, would make little or no use of these policies, due to prejudice and stigmatisation (Rudman and Mescher 2013; Sanzari et al. 2021; Weisshaar 2018). Therefore, no effects are expected even with hypothetical policies.

The results for Switzerland and Germany need to be discussed in light of their family policy regimes. Despite Germany having a more extensive parental leave program than Switzerland (as outlined in Chapter 9), the conjoint models for both countries reveal very similar results. This demonstrates the similarity between the two family policy regimes, despite their differing levels of parental leave. It further highlights the conservative nature and traditional understanding of gender roles in both countries. This impact of parental leave policies in these two conservative family policy regimes suggests that expanding parental leave can cause significant shifts in paternal time use. It is reasonable to assume that more generous leave policies can move continental European countries with a more traditional family policy background to promote more egalitarian family models.

The different elasticities of Swedish and Finnish fathers confirm the distinctions between the family policy regimes in these two countries. Despite both being located in Scandinavia, known for their well-developed family policies, Finland actively supports parental care. This is also reflected in the family models practised in both countries. In families where no one is currently on parental leave, there are slightly fewer egalitarian organised families in Finland than in Sweden, as shown at the bottom of Figure 9.2 in Section 9.3. Although the differences in the conjoint results of the two countries shown in Figure 11.2 may be small, they accurately reflect the nuances of the two social democratic-shaped family policy regimes.

In general, country-specific models indicate that an expansion of parental leave policies has varying effects on fathers and their time allocation, depending not only on the specific features of the leave policies but also on the type of family policy regime in which they live. Conservative regimes may see a potential paternal reduction in paid work and an increase in care time, while this is not the case in liberal states with a strong work ethic. In social democratic regimes with well-developed family policies, only parental leave with full wage replacement has a significant impact on fathers' time allocation, while other leave policies have little effect. Although these countries actively promote equality and support the reconciliation of family and work through various measures, this policy design could further promote the equal division of labour within families.

11.2.4 Variations in Potential Elasticity Among Fathers

In the subgroup analyses, the findings suggest that even men with traditional attitudes are receptive to egalitarian divisions of labour, despite their conservative role perceptions. The economic attribute has the greatest impact. Men who hold traditional attitudes show the highest elasticity with the most radical policy design of full wage replacement.

The elasticity of fathers' time allocation, even among those who claim complete satisfaction with their current time allocation, can be explained as follows: All these families had to organise themselves, regardless of their possibilities or policy conditions. They all had to find a form of organisation that works so far. Although satisfaction levels with current time allocation may vary depending on the situation and family, it is important to note that all arrangements are organised and established. It can be challenging to break out of this system or imagine alternative possibilities under different conditions. Additionally, changing policy conditions may – at least in some cases – "only" lead to a simplification of the organisation. Such assumptions are consistent with research on highly educated mothers that shows that they are willing to engage in the labour market and organise childcare to enable them to work, regardless of existing policies (see, e.g., Stadelmann-Steffen 2011).

Overall, there are indications of paternal elasticity and a willingness to reduce gainful employment, particularly in the case of full wage replacement during parental leave. However, these findings should not be expected to have any immediate policy effects. The mechanisms involved in this process are intricate and long-term, and they interact with various personal, social, and family policy factors. The results suggest that fathers may consider a more egalitarian distribution of time desirable, but factors beyond parental leave prevent them from achieving it. Other policy areas, such as the tax system or the labour market, may also contribute to these factors. As previously discussed, prevailing cultural norms and work ethic can play a central role, as seen in the United States for example. In addition to specific policies, cultural norms and perceptions of values play a crucial role in determining egalitarian time allocation and gendered work arrangements; societal perception of gender roles in particular have a significant impact.

Part V
Conclusion

Summary and Discussion

12

This chapter summarises the main results and brings the different parts and chapters of this book together. Specifically, this section closes the circle by discussing and answering the questions posed in the introduction (specifically in the Subsection 1.1.6 and Section 1.2).

12.1 Summary of the Results

To start with, this section successively addresses each of the three sub-research questions. In addition, the corresponding hypotheses are also discussed. These three strands are then brought together in the subsequent section to address and finally answer the overarching research question.

12.1.1 Egalitarian Form of Parental Leave

The first sub-research question asks: *How should a parental leave policy be designed to achieve maximal egalitarianism?* Subsection 5.1.2 outlined the policy ideal for maximum egalitarianism based on a literature review and answers this question as follows: *Both parents should have a minimum of six months (and a maximum of one year) of non-transferable parental leave with full wage replacement. The leave can be taken flexibly and, if desired, in combination with part-time employment.*

Chapter 7 presented an analytical grid for measuring the egalitarianism of parental leave policies. Two indices were introduced to account for the transferable portions of parental leave that many policies currently allow. The *policy ideal index* reflects the legal component and considers an equal split between

M. Lütolf, *The Balancing Act of Working Mothers and Caring Fathers*,
https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-658-47716-5_12

parents. In contrast, the *policy implementation index* assumes one-sided take-up of parental leave by mothers. The comparison of these two indices highlights the untapped policy potential in the country.

In Chapter 9, the two indices were calculated for the five selected countries using the analysis grid. The results are summarised as follows: The countries included in this study span almost the entire range of the *policy index*, which ranges from 0 to 5, with scores ranging from 0.96 to 4.78. These results support the assumption made in Chapter 6 on case selection that these five countries represent a broad spectrum of family policy regimes.

The United States has a value of 0.96 due to the absence of paid leave, with only an unpaid option that is not available to all parents. However, the policy is egalitarian as there is no gender specification for the FMLA.

The *policy index* for Switzerland is only slightly higher at 1.14. There are no transferable days between parents, as is the case in the United States. Therefore, only one index is applicable since the policy ideal and implementation indices are the same. Switzerland has the lowest gender quotient due to the significant difference between the length of leave periods for mothers and fathers. Switzerland has the highest wage replacement rate, comparable to Scandinavian countries. However, the duration of leave is generally very short, resulting in a low score for the index.

Among the five countries analysed, Germany ranks in the middle based on its indices. The low *policy implementation index* is attributed to the high proportion of transferable days for parental leave. This results in leave lengths that are too long for mothers and too short for fathers. Paid parental leave in Germany provides relatively low financial compensation and, in addition, offers long periods of unpaid leave. In this regard, the policy in Germany could be more supportive of egalitarian family models. This could be accomplished by reducing the duration of leave and increasing financial compensation. This could even be achieved without increasing government expenditure, as the reduced length of leave would result in cost savings.

In Finland and Sweden, leave policies are already relatively egalitarian. Sweden has slightly higher policy indices than Finland due to a slightly higher wage replacement and a gender-neutral policy. However, policies in both countries could be further optimised and made more efficient by increasing wage replacement and reducing transferable shares.

Although Sweden comes very close to achieving the ideal of egalitarian parental leave described above, no country scores the maximum of 5 points on either index. Additionally, although some countries not discussed here already have one

hundred percent wage replacement, none of the five countries analysed offer a full wage replacement policy. Gender-neutral policies can become gender-sensitive when the gender pay gap is taken into account: Fathers tend to lose more wages than mothers, resulting in a greater impact on the family budget when the father takes leave. This creates an indirect incentive for mothers to take leave over fathers. Thus, the potential of leave policies to create incentives for fathers to become more actively involved in childcare is not being fully utilised. None of the leave policies in these five countries are genuinely gender-neutral and therefore cannot fully correspond to an egalitarian leave policy.

This is evident in the descriptive figures of lived family models in Section 9.3. The Scandinavian countries exhibit a higher proportion of egalitarian family models, including both universal breadwinner and universal caregiver models. However, even in these countries, there are still significantly more families adhering to a male breadwinner model than those following a female breadwinner model. Moreover, in families where at least one parent is on leave, there are many more mothers on (full-time) leave than fathers. This result confirms that there are significant gender-specific differences in the parental implementation of leave policies.

12.1.2 Correlations Between Leave Duration and Caregap

The second sub-research question reads: *Does a correlation exist between the length of parental leave taken by fathers upon the birth of their first child and the egalitarianism of the long-term distribution of caregiving responsibilities among parents?* The objective of this investigation is to closely examine the length of leave as an important policy aspect and determine if there is a correlation between the duration of a father's leave uptake and the caregap within the household. The analysis confirms the question, although differences exist depending on the family policy regime.

The analysis of the caregap revealed a distinct gender disparity in perception. The difference in hours spent in unpaid work between a couple is reported significantly larger by women compared to men's reports. The median for the *full sample* was 5, while it was 2 for men's statements about themselves and their partners' care hours, and 10 based on women's statements. As subsequent analyses and hypothesis tests rely solely on the *regression sample* and, therefore, men's statements, the effects found are assumed to be rather conservative. The correlations with the duration of paternal leave take-up may be stronger if the actual care

hours and caregap, derived from them, fall between men's and women's reported hours.

Despite this reservation and a relatively small caregap in the *regression sample*, a clear pattern emerges in the regression models: The longer the father takes parental leave after the birth of his child, the smaller the caregap. This means that unpaid care work is shared more equally between parents when fathers take longer leave. This confirms the first hypothesis: *A more extended period of fathers' parental leave uptake is positively associated with a more egalitarian distribution of unpaid work within households* (H1). This hypothesis is further supported by models specific to different types of absence from the workplace after childbirth, such as leave based on parental leave policy, vacation, or unpaid leave. Additional regression models were used to conduct robustness checks, including gender attitudes and payment of leave. These models demonstrated the same recurring pattern.

To test hypothesis 2, which states that *a generous policy regime, particularly through egalitarian parental leave policies or substantial paternity leave, correlates with a more egalitarian distribution of unpaid work within households* (H2), individual country models were estimated. The pattern observed in the main regression models is present in the model for Switzerland, albeit less pronounced in the models for Germany and the United States, and absent in the models of the Scandinavian countries. However, there are significant differences in the extent of the caregaps among the country models. The disparity in caregap values between Switzerland and Germany, compared to other countries, reflects their more traditional gender roles. Switzerland, with its conservative family policies, exhibits higher caregap values, while Scandinavian countries, known for their egalitarian family policies, show lower caregap values. Despite having weaker family policies, the United States demonstrates comparable results to the Scandinavian countries due to its liberal and employment-focused approach, resulting in more egalitarian patterns in both paid and unpaid work compared to Switzerland. While the European countries confirm hypothesis 2 linking generous family policies to a more equal distribution of unpaid work, the results in the United States partially contradict it. The correlation between leave duration and caregap varies significantly across countries, indicating that the family policy regime not only influences the distribution of unpaid work but also affects the significance of individual decisions to take leave. In countries with conservative policies, such as Switzerland and Germany, fathers' choices regarding parental leave are crucial. In contrast, in countries with generous policies, such as Finland and Sweden, the broader societal context plays a more significant role in shaping family dynamics.

The research underscores the positive impact of prolonged paternal leave in promoting gender equality in caregiving roles and household tasks. This correlation is observed in countries with conservative, liberal, or less egalitarian family policies, suggesting that the duration of paternal leave is indeed a crucial factor in shaping family dynamics and work responsibilities.

The analysis highlights Sweden and Finland as examples of countries where a more egalitarian context exists, leading to a balanced division of unpaid work within families. It is interesting to note that in these countries, gender equality is not dependent on individual paternal leave take-up. This suggests that a broader societal context, shaped by effective family policies, plays a pivotal role in fostering gender equality in caregiving responsibilities. Specifically, the possibility of extended paternal leave has the potential to foster greater gender equality in caregiving and household chores independent of individual leave take-up. The findings emphasise the need for well-designed parental leave policies that actively promote and support fathers' involvement in caregiving, leading to a more balanced distribution of unpaid work within families.

The comparative approach of the analysis complements the study by revealing distinct differences between countries. This comparison highlights the impact of parental leave policies on birth-related absenteeism from the labour market. Although fathers technically have the option to take time off using vacation days, the analysis emphasises the dual purpose of leave schemes: To provide fathers with the option to be present around the birth of their child and to support families financially during work-related absences. In essence, the results underline the multifaceted role of parental leave policies in shaping both gender roles within families.

12.1.3 The Effects of Policy Design on Fathers

The third empirical analysis (see Chapter 11) serves to answer the third sub-research question stating: *Do specific parental leave policy designs have the potential to induce changes in paternal behaviour, particularly in altering the distribution of paid and unpaid work time, and what characteristics define these designs?* This analysis aims to broaden its perspective beyond paternal care behaviour and include the employment behaviour of fathers. While it is evident that parental leave policies have the potential to influence fathers' allocation of time, the extent of the potential change remains unclear. Fathers demonstrate a clear willingness to work fewer hours and spend more time caring for their children, yet there

are various reservations. Firstly, the decrease in working hours does not correspond to the increase in caring hours. However, additional models have shown that there is also an increase in the'other' spheres of life category. This includes more hours in leisure time, personal care activities, and other activities that are not gainful employment, care, or housework. Secondly, the temporal shifts do not significantly depend on specific policy designs. The trend of decreasing employment and increasing care is evident across almost all attribute levels. Thirdly, this experiment presents a hypothetical situation. The measured elasticities can be interpreted as indications of the potential for change, but not as real-world policy effects.

However, hypothesis 3 is confirmed, which suggests that *generous leave leads to a reduction in fathers' employment hours and an increase in unpaid care and domestic work hours* (H3). The same applies to the specified hypothesis on wage replacement: *The level of wage replacement is the policy attribute that most significantly influences fathers' behaviour, with a high level of wage replacement increasing fathers' care time at the expense of employment* (H3a). The V-shaped pattern confirms the hypothesis in all models and for almost all subgroups. It indicates that as wage replacement increases, fathers decrease their paid work and increase their caregiving hours. Predicting the potential changes in the allocation of time is straightforward when estimating the consequences of different levels of wage replacement. Full wage replacement enables any father to take parental leave, while the absence or reduction of wage replacement discourages fathers from doing so. Financial considerations have a particularly strong influence on men's decisions, as they are often the primary earners.

The final hypothesis stating that *the elasticity of fathers towards egalitarian family models depends on the family policy regime of the respective country* (H4) can be corroborated. Models on individual countries highlight the influence of varying family policy regimes. In the United States, a liberal regime with limited parental leave access and cultural norms that prioritise employment, little elasticity is observed. Even if parental leave were available, fathers would be discouraged from taking it due to social stigma and workplace norms. When comparing Switzerland and Germany, similar behavioural patterns emerge despite differences in their parental leave programs. This indicates the influence of conservative family policy regimes and traditional gender roles. The findings suggest that expanding parental leave could promote more egalitarian family models in conservative regimes. In Scandinavia, the behaviour of Swedish and Finnish fathers differs, reflecting the nuances of their respective family policy regimes. However, fathers in these social democratic regimes indicate elasticity with full wage replacement during their leave. Overall, country-specific models suggest

that the impact of extending parental leave on fathers' time allocation is affected by policy characteristics and the type of family policy regime.

In summary, fathers who are likely to show greater elasticity towards an egalitarian time allocation tend to either live in conservative family policy regimes, have workloads exceeding nine hours per day, hold moderate gender norms, or are dissatisfied with their current time allocation. On the other hand, men who hold egalitarian norms or are satisfied with their current arrangements are less likely to increase their care time and decrease their employment hours. The same is true for men living in liberal policy regimes or that are either unemployed or working part-time. However, fathers' elasticity of time allocation remains evident even among men who hold traditional attitudes and norms, as well as those who are satisfied with their current arrangements.

12.2 Answering the Overarching Research Question

After having gained insights from examining specific components throughout this thesis and summarising and discussing the three sub-research questions in the last section, I will now address the overarching question: *How do parental leave policies that are embedded in country-specific family policy regimes promote an egalitarian division of paid work and care work within families?* This section integrates several findings that aim to address the complexities of the overarching question and contribute to the broader discourse within the field of family policy research.

In summary, my research has shown that family policy with egalitarian parental leave can contribute to the pursuit of an egalitarian family model. For parental leave to be truly advancing egalitarianism, it must provide equal benefits for both parents and be non-transferable. To address the issue of low take-up of parental leave by fathers, it is essential to provide full wage replacement for a minimum of six months, up to a maximum of one year per parent. The low take-up of parental leave by fathers is a complex issue that involves the economic factor and the non-transferable entitlement policy attribution. By implementing such an egalitarian parental leave policy, the state acknowledges and values fathers as caregivers and treats parents equally as caregivers of their children, without favouring mothers with additional benefits. The conjoint analyses have demonstrated that fathers are open to reducing their paid work hours in order to take on more caregiving responsibilities. However, the request for increased care involvement at the expense of working time (see also Stadelmann-Steffen et al. 2024) may not be feasible for many fathers under current conditions. The

implementation of an egalitarian parental leave policy by the government could send a clear signal and address this issue while supporting the potential of carers.

The research question is not specifically focused on fathers, but on families as a whole. As explained in the introduction, the goal is to establish policies to promote a universal caregiver family model where parents are joint providers and carers. While many mothers already perform both roles and there are various policies in place that support them (more or less), the focus and policy approach must now be more strongly directed towards fathers. They are still primarily seen as providers and receive little support in their role as caregivers.

As parental leave relates to the beginning of parenthood, a vulnerable time when new roles and tasks must be taken on, it is important to note that the policy's effect extends beyond this initial period. The regression analyses in Chapter 10 demonstrate a clear connection between the duration of fathers' leave and the division of care between parents, even years later.

All three analyses and different models (see Part IV) have consistently shown the crucial significance of wage replacement during the leave period. This economic factor is particularly significant concerning fathers. The concept of the male breadwinner is deeply ingrained in Western society's norms and still reflects the reality for many families today. Even if both parents are employed, the father is often the main provider due to a higher salary or because the wife is employed fewer hours. Therefore, the economic policy element is crucial in order to support fathers and must be developed accordingly. As most families still depend on male income more than on the mother's income, full wage replacement is necessary. Any reduction, no matter how generous the policy design, would indirectly lead to gender specification, which would then contradict the goal of generous policy design.

The discussion thus far has omitted the specification of the overarching research question on the context, i.e., that these parental leave policies are embedded in a country-specific family policy regime.

The case selection in Chapter 6 and the description of the family policy of individual countries describe the range of selected regimes. The United States is a representative of a liberal family policy regime, Switzerland of a liberal-conservative regime, Germany of a conservative regime, Finland of a conservative-social democratic regime, and Sweden of a social democratic regime. Throughout the analyses, these individual types also become apparent. Switzerland is shown to be more conservative than liberal, and the results are more comparable to those in Germany than the United States. Finland, the second hybrid, does not fall in the middle of the political spectrum between

conservative and social democratic representatives. Like Sweden, Finland can be clearly assigned to the social democratic Scandinavian context, albeit with slight deviations towards more conservative family policies.

The analysis of parental leave in Chapter 9 and the resulting policy indices reflect precisely this range of different regimes, where the parental leave policies in the respective countries correspond with their general family policy regime. The index values achieved by Finland and Sweden are comparably high. However, Sweden has slightly higher values due to its more distinct promotion of egalitarianism through gender-neutral policy design. Despite Finland's support for the caregiver role of fathers through generous parental leave that includes non-transferable shares for fathers, the higher share of reserved time for mothers still assigns them somewhat more caregiving responsibilities. In contrast, Germany and Switzerland have clear policy differences regarding parental leave. Switzerland offers comparatively little parental leave, while Germany has implemented a number of reforms in recent decades and now offers extended parental leave. However, it has become clear that the current policy for promoting egalitarian family models in Germany is too lengthy and the wage compensation is too low. The policy could be made more egalitarian by reducing the duration while increasing wage replacement. Comparing the results of the United States to those of other countries is only possible to a limited extent due to the absence of national parental leave. However, according to the descriptive analysis in Chapter 10 (see Figure 10.2), most fathers in the United States take time off from work around the time of childbirth.

Precisely because there are alternative ways of taking time off after childbirth, in addition to national leave policies, the regression analysis also considers vacation and unpaid leave. This analysis also highlights the differences between family policy regimes. The results reveal significant caregaps in Switzerland and Germany when compared to the other three countries. Both countries demonstrate a similar pattern of effects. The conservative nature is apparent in both nations. The Scandinavian countries also share similarities among themselves. Further, the results for the United States are comparable to those of the Scandinavian countries. The caregap appears to depend heavily on the family policy regime and is particularly pronounced in countries with conservative norms, where women undertake significantly more unpaid work than men. Interestingly, parents share unpaid work much more equally when there is either a strongly developed family policy or virtually no state support. Under a liberal system, market-based solutions can evolve to support families in achieving a more egalitarian division of labour. Additionally, the relationship between leave duration and caregap (shown in the main model in Figure 10.3) is no longer evident in these three countries.

This suggests that in social democratic and liberal regimes, the caregap remains relatively small regardless of the duration of leave. Conservative governments, on the other hand, often provide family policies that support the traditional male breadwinner model, while also implementing policies that aim for more egalitarian support. For instance, in Germany, parental leave is available to both parents, but the policy primarily targets mothers by providing long periods of partially unpaid leave. In this context, the correlation between the duration of leave and the caregap is evident.

The comparison of the main model with group-specific models by country follows the same pattern for the conjoint analysis as described for the regression analyses. The effects of the results for Switzerland and Germany align with those of the main model, but are mostly absent in the models for Finland, Sweden, and the United States. However, the Finnish family policy regime is positioned somewhat further away from the social democratic prototype of Sweden. This highlights the more conservative elements of Finnish family policy, with explicit policy support for parental care. Overall, the results confirm that the potential for parental leave to promote egalitarianism in families is highest in conservative regimes. However, there is limited evidence of this in social democratic family policy regimes, and no evidence in the liberal regime of the United States.

By combining the findings from the analysis grid in Chapter 9 with the results on regime differences, particularly from the conjoint analysis, this study suggests that a more egalitarian time allocation could be promoted. If parents in countries with conservative family policy regimes have access to at least six months of fully paid parental leave each, the number of egalitarian family models would most likely increase. This interpretation may be applicable to Switzerland, as it would represent a substantial expansion of current policy. In Germany, however, the conjoint findings show that fathers also exhibit a high degree of elasticity (see Figure 11.2), but parents already have 14 months of (more or less) freely distributable leave at their disposal today. For the German case, a policy reform should be implemented to shorten the current leave duration, increase wage replacement, and remove the transferability of the leave to assign it to the respective parent. While in Finland a reduction in gender-specific policy differences could further promote egalitarianism, for both Scandinavian countries there is potential for policy egalitarianism in wage replacement. The policy attributes that could be further expanded to support egalitarianism in the respective countries, as revealed in the results in Chapter 9, are confirmed in the conjoint analyses as policy attributes, where fathers actually indicate behavioural elasticities.

Reforming parental leave policies may not have an immediate impact. Achieving a transformation towards universal caregiver models is a complex and long-term process influenced by personal, social, and political factors that extend beyond parental leave. These factors include, for example, childcare options, labour market conditions, cultural norms, and gender roles. However, the present analyses indicate that expanded and truly gender-neutral parental leave can effectively promote the universal caregiver family model and could, therefore, play a significant role in shaping such a development.

Contributions and Limitations

13

In this final chapter, I reflect on the overarching contributions and limitations identified by this comprehensive exploration, offering critical insights and their implications for future research and practice. Following up on Section 2.2, the key contributions of this dissertation are summarised and synthesised (in Section 13.1). In Section 13.2, the limitations of the analyses are critically considered and used as a basis for presenting implications for future research. Finally, in Section 13.3, I conclude this thesis with some final thoughts.

13.1 Theoretical and Practical Contributions

This thesis makes several contributions to the existing literature and research. Firstly, it introduces a novel analysis grid that measures the egalitarianism of parental leave policies using two new indices. Furthermore, the grid is empirically tested by analysing the current leave policies in five countries. Secondly, the findings of the regression analysis contribute to the literature on the impact of leave duration by demonstrating a clear connection between longer paternal leave duration and a more equal distribution of unpaid work within the household. Thirdly, the conjoint analysis findings show the potential elasticity for fathers to decrease their workload and increase their care time.

The analyses revealed additional results to the main findings, including the frequencies of actually lived family models, gendered reporting of the caregap, various group specifications, and crucially, country differences representing corresponding family policy regimes and the overarching regime effects, which were evident throughout the empirical analyses.

The combination of different methods and approaches is an important contribution, resulting in a more comprehensive understanding on the topic. The

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multi-layered nature of the analysis provided valuable insights into the effectiveness and impact of parental leave policies in the countries studied. By combining the analysis grid from Section 9.1 with the descriptive illustrations based on survey data in Section 9.3, a link was established between political intentions and their everyday realisation in family lives.

Another strength of this study is the generation and use of a novel dataset. The dataset has various special features and innovations, including the measurement of time allocation for different spheres of life using 24-hour sliders. This innovation's benefits were clearly evident in the application and evaluation. The survey results provide data on the unpaid work performed by the respondents and their partners, which can be used to calculate the caregap. The caregap is a successful indicator to measure the egalitarian distribution of work within a household. The survey also features an experimental section with conjoint scenarios, which is a unique approach in social science research on family policy and reconciliation policy issues.

In addition to its scientific contributions, the study has socio-political implications. The research analyses egalitarianism in the distribution of work within families and identifies policy approaches to support families in reconciling work and family life in an egalitarian manner. Reconciling work and family life is a significant challenge for many families in today's Western societies. However, as the analysis has shown, these challenges are heavily dependent on the family policy regime and vary greatly depending on it.

Policies aimed at promoting a universal caregiver model have broader societal implications beyond their impact on families. Gender-specific divisions of labour have far reaching consequences and contribute to gender inequality in various areas (see Subsection 1.1.1). Inequalities and their negative effects have an impact on society as a whole. Therefore, policies that promote more egalitarian life pattern and reduce inequalities are highly relevant to society.

Lastly, two policy implications are evident: Firstly, a parental leave policy has been developed based on scientific findings that promotes maximum egalitarianism within families. Secondly, it has been demonstrated that the implementation of such a policy is feasible, despite the policy idea appearing utopian at first glance. The potential for policy optimisation relates primarily to wage replacement, which occurs in all five countries examined. It is important to note that in certain countries, full wage replacement could even be implemented without

any increase in the total cost of the policy.[1] This indicates the existence of feasible reforms that could substantially enhance the egalitarian potential of current policies.

13.2 Limitations and Future Research

There are methodological limits that need to be considered. As discussed in Subsection 10.1.1 on the caregap, there are systematic gender differences in the reporting of one's own time allocation. The reasons for this phenomenon cannot be conclusively clarified at this point, and social desirability probably plays a role. Further research on gendered reporting could provide new insights. However, this survey used an innovative measuring instrument with a 24-hour slider (presented in Subsection 8.2.3) to limit potential desirability distortions seen in other surveys (discussed in Section 8.1). The slider encouraged participants to record realistic values.

There is a limitation regarding causality in the regression analyses. The issue of endogeneity is widely discussed in the context of this analysis (see Subsections 8.3.4 and 10.2.4). To address this limitation and examine causality, a conjoint analysis and the experimental section of the survey are incorporated as the third method of analysis (presented in Subsection 8.2.4 and Chapter 11). One aspect that could not be explored further in the course of this study is the use of "additional time" of fathers in the conjoint. The decrease in employment hours led to both more unpaid work and an increase in the residual category "other". Further research is needed to provide a more detailed breakdown of how fathers would spend their newly available time.

In addition to these methodological limitations, there are also limitations at the content and thematic level. The decision to limit the research to parental leave is well-justified, as pointed out previously and confirmed by Ciccia and Verloo (2012, p. 508), highlighting the special feature of parental leave policies to attract

[1] The potential for increasing wage replacement exists primarily in Germany, but could also be considered in Sweden and Finland at the cost of reducing the duration of leave. However, Switzerland cannot make such an adjustment by decreasing the duration, as its existing leave options are already significantly shorter than the ideal policy design. Similarly, the United States cannot make such an adjustment as there is currently no provision for paid leave at the national level. Implementing an ideal leave policy in Switzerland and the United States would be more difficult and costly compared to the adjustments that could be achieved in the other three countries. Significant expansion of existing regulations would be required, which presents a challenging task.

individuals who are not currently caregivers to become caregivers. Parental leave policies, with their unique ability to attract non-carers into caregiving roles, form the bedrock of behavioural change within the context of family policies. While parental leave is a crucial aspect of family policy, it is essential to acknowledge its limitations in providing a comprehensive solution to the challenges faced by families. It is important to recognise that the promotion of a universal caregiver family model involves more than just parental leave. This section discusses the inherent constraints of the research, emphasising the need for a broader perspective. A more comprehensive approach would need to include considerations of labour market conditions that enable part-time work without disadvantages, household income, tax systems, social security, and the associated risk of poverty for families, but first of all, it would need to integrate childcare policies.

Childcare policies are important to the universal caregiver family model, seamlessly extending support beyond parental leave. They complement each other, with childcare solutions stepping in as parental leave concludes. This symbiotic relationship ensures a smooth transition for working parents, emphasising the importance of a continuous and comprehensive policy-mix to balance both professional and family responsibilities. Childcare is indispensable in a universal caregiver family model, catering to parents with overlapping work schedules. Policies should ensure an adequate number of spots, maintain high quality, be affordable, conveniently located, and offer extended hours to accommodate diverse work schedules (Ciccia and Bleijenbergh 2014; Oehrli et al. 2024; Schober 2020; Stahl and Schober 2020).

Further, a more comprehensive family policy should take into account the prevailing labour market conditions. This involves creating an environment that not only supports caregiving responsibilities but also facilitates the participation of both parents in the workforce. This may include policies that encourage flexible working arrangements and promote job-sharing opportunities. A key aspect thereof is the promotion of part-time work without imposing disadvantages on employees. This requires addressing issues such as wage gaps, career progression, and access to benefits for part-time workers. Policies that incentivise employers to provide equitable opportunities for part-time employees can help ensure that individuals can balance work commitments with caregiving responsibilities without sacrificing their professional development. Ensuring that individuals can maintain a healthy work-life balance is crucial for the success of a universal caregiver family model.

Tax systems shape family finances significantly, and a comprehensive family policy-mix would require a careful examination and potential reform to ease the economic burden on caregivers. Adapting tax systems with credits, deductions,

and progressive taxation is essential for creating a fairer economic environment and reducing financial strain on families. Similarly, a comprehensive family policy addresses social security, ensuring caregiver-specific provisions to protect individuals during caregiving periods. Additionally, recognising and addressing the risk of poverty for families, especially those with caregiving responsibilities, is vital. This involves targeted measures like income support, housing assistance, and affordable healthcare to protect families from economic hardship and contribute to their overall well-being.

In essence, a holistic family policy that would advance egalitarianism, encompasses various dimensions, including childcare, labour market conditions, and economic support mechanisms. While parental leave addresses an important facet of caregiving, considering these additional policy fields in research would provide a more realistic (but complex) perspective. Together, they could cultivate a more supportive and equitable environment for caregivers, thereby advancing the success of a universal caregiver family model. Further research is required to establish connections between these policy areas, thoroughly examine their interactions, and present new insights into these mechanisms.

The exclusive focus on national policies represents a further limitation. Examining sub-national distinctions and corporate-level provisions could yield additional insights, particularly in federalist countries. Subsequent research should delve into these nuances to refine comprehension of family policy effectiveness. Yet, this constraint primarily resides in theoretical considerations and the application of the analysis grid to the five countries in Chapter 9. The empirical assessment of paternal leave duration in Chapter 10 scrutinises not solely national policy but the actual uptake by fathers, encompassing sub-national policies and employer-level solutions. This shows a degree of incongruence of levels of government considered: The policy indices were measured using national policies only, while the regression analyses included all levels of government, including the company level. The analysis in Chapter 11 takes an experimental approach and does not refer to existing policies, so there is no differentiation between national or sub-national policies indicated either. Acknowledging that the theoretical discussion and the analytical grid could benefit from a more thorough exploration, recognition of sub-national variations and company-level provisions could enhance the comprehensiveness of the research and thus the validity and generalisability of the results, particularly in countries with limited national solutions.

Moreover, descriptive findings (see Figure 10.2) have shown that even in countries without a national policy solution, the majority of fathers take employment

breaks in connection with the birth of their child. Further analysis could provide valuable insights into the different types of leave and available options in such countries. Analyses and data collection on company-based leave could provide new insights into the extent of coverage of such policies, as well as the relationship between company culture and policy use.

The final point concerns generalisability. The theoretical discussion and analysis are limited to five countries, which raises concerns about its transferability to other contexts. Nevertheless, the selection of cases includes countries that are prototypical of family policy regimes, and the selected five countries cover a wide range of these regimes. Therefore, it is possible to make assumptions for countries that have similar policy regimes and contexts to those analysed. Caution must be exercised when generalising conclusions to other countries, as each country's unique socio-economic and cultural context influences the applicability of findings to other nations. However, it is worth noting that the selected cases are limited to Western democracies, and therefore only cover a specific geographical region. As a result, generalisations about other political and cultural contexts cannot be made. In this regard, research considerations that extend beyond the European and North American contexts would significantly expand current discussions.

In conclusion, this chapter has highlighted the thesis' limitations, acknowledging the importance of parental leave within the broader framework of family policies. Recognising these limitations is crucial for understanding the scope and applicability of the research findings to diverse caregiving contexts worldwide. Furthermore, I have suggested several avenues for future research.

13.3 Concluding Thoughts

This research sheds light on the interplay between family dynamics and policies that promote a more equitable distribution of work between parents. It examined parental leave policies and its effects on patterns of caregiving within families and fathers' allocation of time. This thesis develops an ideal policy design to promote egalitarianism in the division of work within families, while supplementing existing research findings on policy effects on women. It demonstrates that policy design has an impact on fathers' time allocation and further specifies the functioning of this effect.

To end with, let me conduct a thought experiment and explore the possibility of implementing this ideal parental leave policy. While this policy may appear

utopian in certain contexts, its consequences are broadly positive to combat poverty, to sustain mental health and to support child development. Envisioning such idealistic policies is essential progress towards a gender-equal world. This aligns with the quote "We cannot expect to arrive at a gender-equal world without either knowing what that world might look like or identifying policy agendas for welfare and employment reform that might move us in that direction." (Rubery 2015, p. 535), which has already been cited at the beginning of my thesis.

The underlying assumption entails that both parents have access to fully compensated parental leave of at least six months, and that this policy is taken up by both mothers and fathers. With this ideal parental leave policy, both parents can take on a caring role from the very beginning. The responsibility for care is shared between both parents. Due to their established role as caregivers, parents retain this responsibility when they re-enter the labour market, as the division of labour has been shown to be path-dependent. When returning to the labour market, most parents will not want to reduce their carer roles to marginal hours, the labour market will also need to adapt over time. In times of a shortage of skilled workers, employers have an interest in remaining attractive to their employees and are looking for ways to meet their needs. In this ideal world, part-time jobs are available to parents and they can organise most of their working hours around each other. Thus, time spans during which parents are unable to provide care are typically limited. These instances can be supplemented by affordable, high-quality childcare facilities or, alternatively, by grandparents or other caregivers, depending on individual preferences and circumstances.

Over time, the labour market would adapt by reducing gender segregation in the workforce. With the caregiver role becoming gender-neutral, employers no longer differentiate based on gender. On the one hand, egalitarian parental leave enables parents to take a baby break. On the other hand, both mothers and fathers may need to take time off for sick children. Therefore, employers must anticipate work absenteeism of both parents and can no longer assume gender differences of availability.

Through the course of time, other gender-specific discrimination, such as the wage gap, may also cease to exist. Birth-related absences from the labour market are similar for both genders, and both parents have reduced their workload to take on an active caring role, leading to the convergence of the life courses between the genders. Mothers no longer unilaterally lose professional experience, allowing for gender-neutral career development. This is reflected in the gender ratios of management positions and the reduction of the gender wage gap. The role of the provider is no longer gendered: Changes in the labour market and a narrowing

wage gap mean that women are at much lower risk of poverty than they used to be.

In addition to economic changes, this egalitarian family organisation would also have a psychological impact. By sharing responsibilities between parents, the mental load is more evenly distributed and jointly borne, which in turn has a positive effect on mental health. Through the active involvement of both parents in their children's upbringing, children benefit from strong relationships with both parents, which strengthens their development.

By challenging current gender norms and implementing gender-neutral family policies, gender-specific barriers are broken down. In this utopian fairy tale, both girls and boys will be socialised without the need to consider the compatibility of their career choices with family life, as it will be guaranteed for everyone.

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