

Take it or leave it? Factors for fathers' parental leave take-up in Germany

Corinna Frodermann, Ann-Christin Bächmann & Andreas Filser

Institute for Employment Research (IAB), Nuremberg, Germany

Corresponding Author:

Corinna Frodermann Corinna.Frodermann2@iab.de

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Abstract

In 2007, Germany introduced incentives for fathers to increasing fathers' involvement in childcare and reduce parenthood-related gender inequalities. Yet, more than half of all fathers do not claim any parental allowance and if they do, three quarters only take the minimum of two months. Previous research on this hesitancy in fathers' parental leave take-up has been limited in scope, lacking longitudinal pre-birth information, or neglecting partner characteristics, including whether paternal leave was concurrent with the partner's leave. Our study circumvents these limitations by utilizing the Integrated Employment Biographies (IEB) which contain the complete employment biography for both partners of 114,392 married heterosexual couples who were employed subject to social security and became parents in 2007–2013. This data allows for exploring individual-, couple-, and context-level factors for paternal leave take-up, its duration, and the share of solo leave time taken while the partner was actively employed. Preliminary results suggest that fathers are more likely to take parental leave if their spouse has a tertiary degree, yet educational differences are largely insignificant for the overall duration and the solo leave time. With respect to income, fathers' parental leave take-up, duration, and solo leave time diverge by the share of income earned by the wife in high-income household, while no differences between income constellations emerge for low household incomes. On the context level, East German fathers are more likely to take parental leave and take more solo leave time than West German fathers, but overall leave duration is similar between both regions.

Extended Abstract

Motivation and Research Question

In 2007, a comprehensive parental leave reform in Germany created new incentives for fathers to participate more in childcare: The reform introduced a 'daddy quota' that extends the regular twelve months of paid parental leave by two months if each parent takes at least two months of leave. Despite these incentives, in 2018, more than half of fathers in Germany did not claim any parental allowance. Of the fathers who claimed parental allowance, three quarters only took the two months that would expire otherwise (Destatis, 2021). Prior studies highlight that the general hesitancy in parental-leave take-up by fathers is stratified by socio-economic and educational differences. Yet, the analyses either lack long-running, longitudinal data on parental leave duration or pre-parenthood employment patterns (Geisler & Kreyenfeld, 2019; Reich, 2011; Samtleben et al., 2019; Trappe, 2013a), neglect partner characteristics (Trappe, 2013b) or focus on subgroups such as academics (Brandt, 2017).

However, pre-parenthood characteristics of both partners are a key factor when couples decide how they divide market and care labor, including if and for how long fathers take parental leave. For instance,

new home economics (Becker, 1991) or the resource-bargaining frameworks (e.g. Lundberg & Pollak, 1996) suggest that the partners' labor market opportunities influence their participation in childcare (and homework). These frameworks take a gender-neutral perspective and emphasize that couples follow an opportunity-cost heuristic based each partner's labor market position. In contrast, prevailing gender norms and the doing-gender perspective (West & Zimmerman, 1987) argue that men should generally be less involved in childcare (and housework); regardless of – or even despite – the labor market opportunities of their partner.

In our study, we incorporate these perspectives and explore individual-, couple-, and firm-level characteristics *before* the onset of parenthood to analyze factors for fathers' parental leave take-up and its length. Our study contributes to the literature in two main aspects: First, using long-running daily panel data on the employment status of both partners, allows for examining not only whether a father has taken parental leave, but also the duration of his leave and how much of his leave is concurrent with active employment of his partner. Second, we are able to consider key information on the employment biography and firm characteristics of both partners over their entire employment biography prior to the transition to parenthood.

Data and Estimation Strategy

Our data derives from the Integrated Employment Biographies (IEB) of the IAB which provide daily information on all persons in Germany who are employed subject to social security, marginally employed, recipients of unemployment insurance or registered job searchers (around 80% of the working population). Based on this information, our data set contains the complete employment biography, including firm characteristics, for married couples in which both partners were employed subject to social security at some point between 2001 and 2014 (Bächmann et al., 2021). In total, our analytical sample contains 114,392 married couples who became parents for the first time between 2007 and 2013. The rich information on both partners' employment biographies allows us to better approximate couples' decision-making processes based on pre-pregnancy circumstances. Specifically, we can measure the variables of interest 10 months before birth, i.e., before potential reductions in work volume due to pregnancy might already decrease women's income.

Our analytical strategy is based on the logic of an exponential hurdle model. The first decision is whether to take any parental leave, and for this, we estimate a probit model to predict whether a father takes any parental leave. In the second stage, we model the decision on the duration of parental leave among those who do take parental leave using a linear regression model. However, we consider the associations for each decision stage separately, rather than combining them into a single coefficient. This approach allows us to explore whether specific factors differ between each decision stage. In an additional step, we explore the share of solo paternal leave, i.e., the share of paternal leave that is taken while the partner is actively employed.

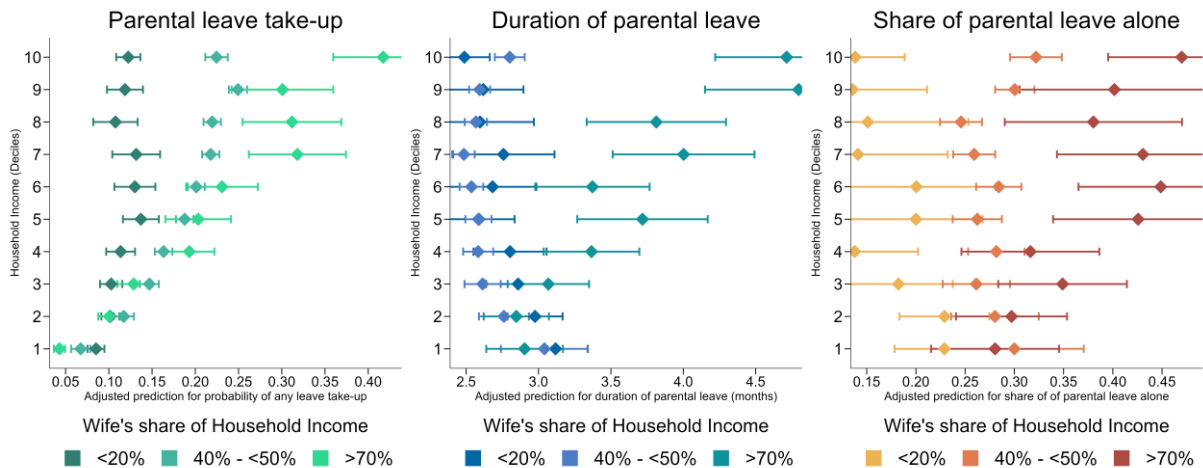
Based on our theoretical considerations, the central independent variables describe the labour market potential (or bargaining power) of both partners. We consider the pre-birth household income as well as the income relation, and education relation in the couple. Moreover, as an approximation of the prevailing gender norms in the couple and in the environment, we consider the population structure of the place of residence and an east-west-dummy. Finally, as previous research has pronounced the importance of workplace characteristics, we control for firm size, industry, and proportion of women in the firm.

Results

Figures 1-3 display preliminary results, which support both micro-economic approaches (new household economics and bargaining) and identity theories. In line with micro-economic approaches, fathers' likelihood to take parental leave increases with pre-birth household incomes, yet only for couples in which the wife contributed at least 40% to the household income (Figure 1, left panel). For couples in which the wife contributed only less than 20 percent to the household income, fathers' parental leave

take-up is similar across the household income range. Similar patterns emerge for the other two parental leave indicators: fathers take longer leaves and more solo leave time when pre-birth household incomes are higher, but this only holds for couples with a high share of the household income earned by the wife (Figure 1, middle and right panel).

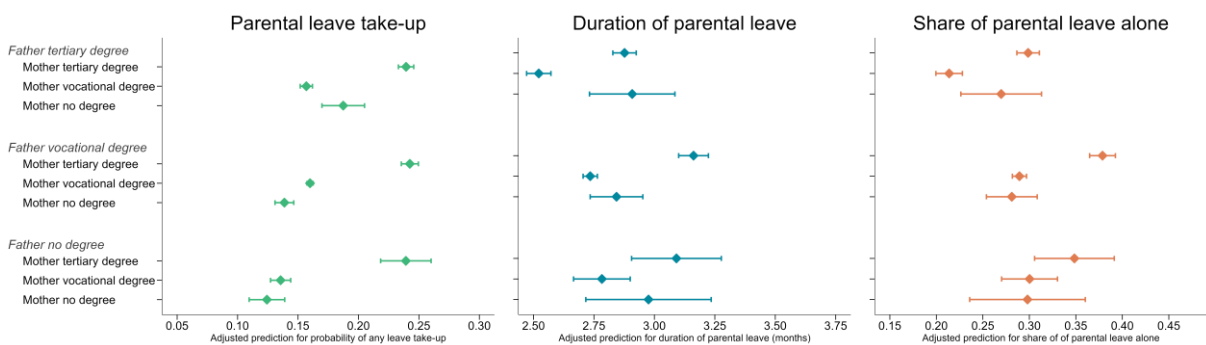
Figure 1: Adjusted predictions for fathers’ probability to take any leave (left), the total duration (middle) and share of parental leave alone (right panel) based on the household income constellation (income earned 22 to 10 months before birth).



Coefficient plot, estimates are reported as adjusted predictions, 95 % CI. Model controls for nationality & education of both partners, fathers’ age, labour market and unemployment experience, population density, east/west, firm size, industry, and proportion of women in firm. Source: IEB V13.00.01-171010, own calculation.

Additionally, we find that the education of the mother is associated with fathers’ parental leave uptake: men are more likely to take leave if their wife has a tertiary degree (Figure 2, left panel). For the leave duration and share of leave taken alone, educational differences are only small and largely not significant (Figure 2, middle and right panel).

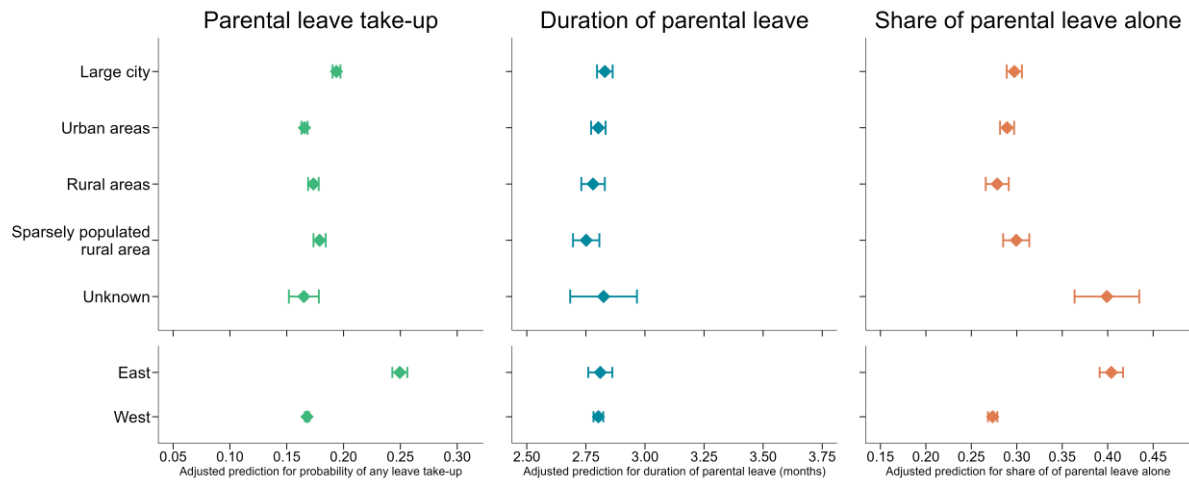
Figure 2: Adjusted predictions for fathers’ probability to take any leave (left), the total duration (middle) and share of parental leave alone (right panel) based on the education constellation.



Coefficient plot, estimates are reported as adjusted predictions, 95 % CI. Model controls for nationality of both partners, fathers’ age, labour market and unemployment experience, population density, east/west, firm size, industry, and proportion of women in firm. Source: IEB V13.00.01-171010, own calculation.

In line with identity theories, fathers in a more egalitarian contexts (East Germany, larger cities) are more likely to take parental leave (Figure 3, left panel). However, we do not find similar associations for the duration of fathers’ parental leave (Figure 3, middle panel). Findings on the share of parental leave taken alone, we find higher solo leave shares for fathers from East Germany, while no differences emerge based on population density (Figure 3, right panel). Finally, we find first hints towards the doing gender perspective as fathers tend to take shorter leave if their wives work more hours than they do (not depicted).

Figure 3: Adjusted predictions for fathers' probability to take any leave (left), the total duration (middle) and share of parental leave alone (right panel) based on the population density (upper panels) and East or West German place of residence.



Coefficient plot, estimates are reported as adjusted predictions, 95 % CI. Model controls for household income, income constellation, nationality & education of both partners, fathers' age, labour market and unemployment experience, firm size, industry, and proportion of women in firm. Source: IEB V13.00.01-171010, own calculation.

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