

# Parenting, Fathers and Child Development

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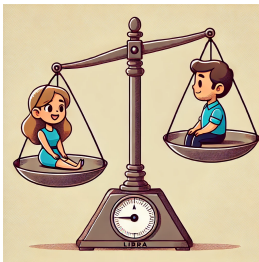
*Understanding Society*

*The future of families policy conference tackling long-term  
challenges*

31 October 2024

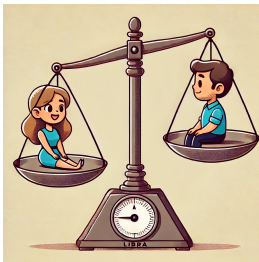
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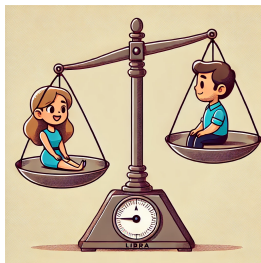
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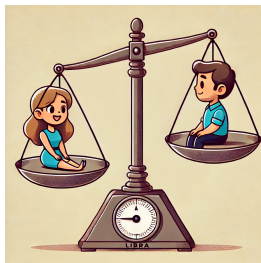


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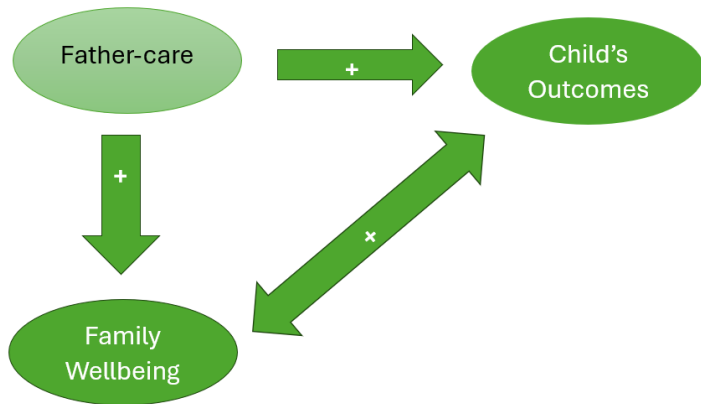
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Why?

- ▶ Lack of data
- ▶ Preconceived ideas of mothers being more important for child development

# Correlational evidence from UK data



From British Household Panel Survey, Avon Longitudinal Study of Parents and Children, Millennium Cohort Study. [Details](#)

# Paternity leave to the rescue

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- ② **From correlation to causation**: changes in paternity leave policies provide a clear way of studying the causal impact of fathers involvement on children outcomes

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## Gender Norms:

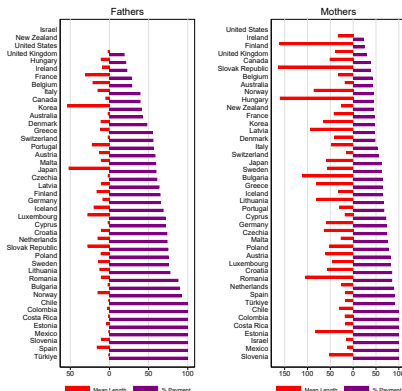
- + egalitarian gender attitudes of fathers and sons
- + equal division of household work from fathers and sons



# Parental leave in the UK

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Figure: Duration and average pay of family leave entitlements, 2023



Source: OECD data. Paid leave entitlements in place as of April 2023. Data reflect entitlements at the national or federal level only, and do not reflect regional variations or additional/alternative entitlements provided by states/provinces or local governments in some countries. The 'average payment rate' refers the proportion of previous earnings replaced by the benefit over the length of the paid leave entitlement for a person earning 100% of average national full-time earnings. For Chile, Germany, Lithuania, Romania and France payment rates are proportions of *net* earnings. This data does not consider top-ups from employers.

⇒ UK: among the **worst** OECD countries in terms of **pay** and **duration**.

# Paternity leave in the UK

- **Very low uptake**

- ▶ over 1/3 of fathers do not take any paternity leave;
- ▶ median length of paternity leave is 2 weeks. (PTS, 2023)
- ▶ 3% of eligible parents take shared parental leave;
- ▶ mothers take on average 19 weeks, fathers 14 weeks. (DBT, 2023)

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**Why?**

# Why don't fathers take parental leave?

- Issues with available data:
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- Issues with available data:
  - ▶ info on beliefs and preferences
  - ▶ small number of observations for policies with low uptake
- Solution:
  - ▶ With *Laura Fumagalli* (University of Essex) and *Sonkurt Sen* (University of Bonn) we collected **our own data**.



SHARE THE CARE



# Why don't fathers take parental leave? Finding 1

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## YES

- ▶ importance of **top-up** and relative mother/father **salary** in assigning weeks of leave to fathers
- ▶ after an intervention treatment about the positive impact of fathers on the family wellbeing, respondents are more willing to sign a **petition** asking the government to **increase the pay** of SPL



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- **Gender norms:** parenting, especially a newborn, is a mother's job

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## YES

- ▶ more **egalitarian** individuals more willing to give the fathers more weeks of leave
- ▶ people who **know individuals who took SPL** more willing to give the fathers more weeks of leave

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- **No positive returns to father-care**: people might not value the time that fathers spend with their children as much as the time that mothers spend with them

## NO

- ▶ on average, **positive beliefs** of fathers spending longer time on leave **for mothers** (back to full-time work, maternal depression), **fathers** (attachment, help with homework), and **children** (nutrition, academic performance).
- ▶ these beliefs partly explain hypothetical leave decisions (for women only)

# Why don't fathers take parental leave? Summarizing...

- **Financial coverage of leave** and **gender norms** could be the main elements to target by policies if we want to increase paternity leave uptake, hence encouraging the presence of fathers early on in the life of their children.

# Winds of change?



**Workers' rights: Sick pay and parental leave part of major overhaul**

A major overhaul of workers' rights is planned, but the changes will not take place for two years.



**Dad says taking parental leave was 'challenging'**



Mr. Skinner said there was stigma attached to his decision to take parental leave

**Opinion** Maternity & paternity rights

Here's a radical way to shrink the gender pay gap for British women: give men more paternity leave

*George Gabriel*



The damper put on women's careers by becoming mothers is one of main causes of pay inequality. New thinking on childcare would address that

Wed 25 Sep 2024 14:00 BST



# Thank you!

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# Correlational evidence from UK data

- *British Household Panel Survey:*

- ▶ Fathers of preschoolers working long hours → - educational achievement, - psychological distress and unemployment in adulthood.

- *Avon Longitudinal Study of Parents and Children (1990s):*

- ▶ mothers going back to work full-time when children are very young → + equal division of parenting duties → + child outcomes
- ▶ father working long hours (when babies) → + behaviour problems in children when aged 9-11.

- *Millennium Cohort Study (2000/1):*

- ▶ father's involvement in housework and childcare → + maternal, family and couple satisfaction; - developmental or behavioural difficulties at age 3, and + children mental wellbeing.
- ▶ in two-parent white families where the father is the sole breadwinner → girls at age 5 + behavioural difficulties than in households where mothers are employed.
- ▶ fathers that had no access to flexible working or who had taken no parental leave → + emotional and behavioural difficulties at age 3.